

**READING MORE THAN  
MARJANE SATRAPI'S *PERSEPOLIS***

**THESIS SUBMITTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHESTER FOR THE DEGREE OF  
*DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY***

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## **DECLARATION**

**I declare that the material presented for examination here is my own work and has not been submitted for an award at this or another higher education institution.**

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All praise belongs to Allah, the First, without a first before Him, the Last, without a last before Him (*Sahife Sajjadiyye*, Imam Zain al-Abideen, supplication 1). Praise is due to His legitimate and righteous representative *Imam al-Asr-e va Zaman* and his companions whose extreme and unconditional love and support equipped me to complete this thesis. I would like to offer my heartiest thanks and gratitude to my dearest parents whose sincerest *douas* have always been with me throughout my life. I ask Allah to “forgive me through my supplication for my parents, and forgive them through their devotion toward me with unfailing forgiveness” (*Sahife Sajjadiyye*, Imam Zain al-Abideen, supplication 24).

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## NOTES

- The title of this thesis is inspired by *Jasmin and Stars: Reading More than Lolita* by Fatemeh Keshavarz (2007).
- Unless otherwise indicated, the translations from Arabic and Farsi works are of the author.
- The system of transliteration used in this thesis is the system which is the most agreeable with *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. However, other forms of transliteration have been used in this thesis. These may be different from those of the author, but are retained in order to keep the direct quotations intact.
- Persepolis is a Greek name which literally means ‘city of Persians’. This city is located in the south-West of present-day Iran, in Fars Province. Persepolis is also known as Takht-e Jamshid and used to be the capital of the Achaemenid Empire, where Darius the Great was on the throne (Mark, 2009). Persepolis has been the sign of Iranian culture and heritage for thousands of years. “Although it is in ruins today, Persepolis remains a city central to Persian identity: it recalls a time when Iran was a powerful empire and when it was pre-Islamic. In 1971, Reza Shah Pahlavi used Persepolis to stage the celebration of the 2,500 year of Iran’s monarchy [...]. Since 1979, however, the Islamic Republic of Iran has tried to diminish Persepolis’ importance as part of a larger policy against Iran’s pre-Islamic heritage” (Leservot, 2011, p. 128).
- Satrapi was born in 1969 and is currently living in France. The author has explored the option to interview Satrapi carefully. Since the book, the author and the film are presently banned in Iran, direct contact with Satrapi would affect the author detrimentally in terms of a future career life in Iran. A member of the Iranian government has informally stated that in case of an interview, new sets of declarations might appear that have to be recorded and reflected in the thesis as they are. The Islamic Republic of Iran would not appreciate such new material.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis reclaims the analysis of Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*. It is mindful of analysis of the stereotypical, and partial tendencies of orientalist representations of Satrapi's work by both Iranian officials and "Western" media and readership. Themes are detected from this analysis and pertain to the message and intention of the author to create her work. The *intentio lectoris*<sup>1</sup> (i.e. what audiences believe or led to believe) proposed that orientalist paradigms present the meaning of the work or Satrapi's agenda, i.e. the *intentio auctoris*. *Persepolis* has been enthusiastically received all around the world, except in Iran. It has been described and interpreted as the critique of a courageous girl against the foundations of the Iranian Islamic Republic. Notwithstanding the success, the graphic novel and the animated movie derived from it in 2007 have been banned by the Iranian government, and subsequently Marjane Satrapi has been refused entry into the country. The polarised reception of Satrapi's work in Iran and worldwide, is contextualised within (neo) orientalist critique. I detect in these receptions both potentials and problems. Reclaiming aspects of *Persepolis*' analysis that have been excluded from and therefore devalued by external agencies is affirmed as a necessary and important contribution. However, I note that the overwhelming reluctance amongst "Western" media and news reporters to speak of Satrapi's dual and neutral position, or to grasp at specificity her *intentio auctoris*, prevents us from a thorough discussion of their analysis. Satrapi's work is ultimately left in the hands of clichés. I attempt to analyse *Persepolis* in such a way that it not only affirms rationality, fluidity, and duality, but also offers new and beneficial ways to argue Satrapi's position and intention. My thesis is thus partly rooted in a feminist standpoint perspective to give voice to Satrapi's agenda. What is more, it converses with similar restrictive regulations and contextualises them within an analysis of selected post-revolutionary autobiographical literature. My ultimate goal is to analyse the Iranian position towards *Persepolis* by making sense of the theological and political thought of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Revolution, and the concept of *velayat-e faqih* (guardianship of the jurists) and the national and international responses to it in a way in which to take and transform the representation of *Persepolis* and Iranian culture consequently. This is done by explaining the current Iranian situation and Iranian responses to internal and external threats. Theological analyses and the explication of some of the historical complexities affecting modern Iran (especially after the revolution) would be beneficial along the way.

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<sup>1</sup> This distinction has been developed by Italian semiotician Umberto Eco (1994) to disengage literary critique from the dogmatism and fallacy of strict philologists and deconstructuralists.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Brief outline**

This thesis sets out to undertake an analysis of Marjane Satrapi's graphic novel *Persepolis* (2003),<sup>2</sup> based on the concept of *intentio auctoris* (i.e. the rationale behind Satrapi's representation of Iran) and the representations and receptions of it i.e. *intentio lectoris*, considering the discrepancy resulting from the interaction between the two, by placing it in the context of selected post-revolutionary memoirs by diaspora Iranians. Marjane Satrapi and her *intentio auctoris* have been silenced, or manipulated, by *intentio lectoris*, in this case a convergence of agencies such as the publishing market, the cinematographic industry, show business, media, the ideologies resulting from the current geopolitical situation and, last but not least, various Iranian theological and political positions.<sup>3</sup> *Persepolis* has achieved great popularity worldwide, except in Iran. The initial research question is an analysis of the polarised reception of Satrapi's work in Iran and worldwide. This provides an opportunity to contribute to scholarly discourses on Iranian politics, history and culture pre- and post-Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran. The argument is set against the essentialist views and their global advertisement to restructure them in a more nuanced and detailed framework to discuss the accusation of *Islam setizi* (hostility towards Islam) set against *Persepolis* and its epigones, as well as other post-revolutionary autobiographies. It emerges that *Persepolis* is at the centre of a tapestry informed by diverse, and often discordant views and agendas. A paradox emerges when one analyses *intentio auctoris* and the meaning her work has assumed for international audiences, or *intentio lectoris*.

### **Analysis of *intentio auctoris* and *intentio lectoris***

Satrapi's graphic novel is an autobiography. *Persepolis* – a personal political and historical account – summarises in quick, intelligent flashes a woman's experience of growth during and after the Iranian Islamic Revolution (1979). Satrapi introduces the reader to the collapse of the world of her childhood, and the dramatic changes that followed the downfall of the Pahlavi<sup>4</sup> regime and the affirmation of the Islamic Republic of Iran. *Persepolis* engages

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<sup>2</sup> The focus of this research is primarily Marjane Satrapi's graphic novel *Persepolis* (2003) and the homonymous animated movie presented, and celebrated at the 2007 Cannes Film Festival.

<sup>3</sup> Davis (2005) believes that full understanding of a book like *Persepolis* is very much dependent on the cultural and political contexts in which the story happened. "Indeed, to engage these narratives effectively, we must move beyond an analytical model of merely reading the surface of texts for potential meanings and attend to the cultural and generic codes addressed by the authors to unravel what the texts execute within the contexts of larger questions of cultural and political mobilization" (p. 265).

<sup>4</sup> "The Qajar dynasty was overthrown in 1921 in a military takeover led by a soldier named Reza Khan. Reza Khan proclaimed himself shah, shortly thereafter in 1925 ... the reign of Reza Shah lasted until August 1941...Reza Shah would be forced to abdicate in favour of his son Mohammad Reza Pahlavi" (Schroeder, 2010, p. 26).



with the author's hold on reality and her questioning of the events around her. By acknowledging her losses, Satrapi looks at the Islamic culture of Iran as the source of most of her troubles. The story, which is set in Tehran, changes location when a teenage Marjane is sent to Vienna to continue her education. Eventually she returns to Tehran, depressed and disillusioned, where she studies at the university, gets married and, after around three years, gets divorced. In Iran, with other fellow students, she is forced to accept the rules of the Islamic revolutionary government. Practical and conceptual rules and regulations are set against life before the revolution and outside Iran by means of ironic, nostalgic and intimate vignettes.

A graphic novelist, director, illustrator and author presently living in France, Marjane Satrapi has since confirmed her standing as a novelist with *The Sigh* (2004),<sup>5</sup> *Embroideries* (2005),<sup>6</sup> *Monsters are Afraid of the Moon* (2006)<sup>7</sup> and *Chicken with Plums* (2006).<sup>8</sup> Following the success of *Persepolis*,<sup>9</sup> the graphic novel has been adapted into an animated movie directed by French comic artist Vincent Paronnaud and Marjane Satrapi. The film won the Jury Prize at the 2007 Cannes Film Festival and was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature in the USA. *Persepolis* is an outspoken political work, especially in its second part (Satrapi in Dave, 2006). The roots of its success, it may be argued, lie precisely in its religious, social and political polemics - a missing factor in Satrapi's subsequent works. An important one is it having been set at the time of the making of revolutionary Iran.<sup>10</sup>

*Persepolis* has been written from a personal point of view and is based upon the subjective opinions and experiences of its author. Notwithstanding Satrapi's declarations,<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *The Sigh* (2004) is an illustrated novel by Satrapi. It is a fairy tale about a rich merchant who has three daughters. He brings them gifts from the market. One of the girls asks for a blue seed. The merchant cannot find the seed and the girl sighs. A creature, a Sigh, takes the seed for the merchant, and the price of this is to take the girl to mysterious places. The book does not completely follow the standards of a graphic novel and is more like a storybook for children.

<sup>6</sup> *The Embroideries* (2005) by Satrapi is for adults and is about the sex lives of women in Iran. Gossips, arranged marriages, love marriage or the virginity of girls before marriage in Iranian culture are the topics of debate for Satrapi's mother, grandmother, auntie and neighbours.

<sup>7</sup> *Monsters are Afraid of the Moon* (2006) is a children's story by Satrapi. As the main character Marie goes to bed each night, she has a visit from three monsters. They all appear in the dark, so she cuts the moon of the sky and puts it on her bed. When the moon is, there, there are no monsters - but how will the rest of the village manage without a moon?

<sup>8</sup> *Chicken with Plums* (2006) is another graphic novel by Satrapi, and was adapted into a film in 2011. It is a story based on Satrapi's family history in Iran, and is set in Tehran in 1958. Naser Ali Khan, the most renowned musician of his day, loses all his hope and taste for life after breaking his beloved violin. It is a universal story of music and love.

<sup>9</sup> None of Satrapi's works are as famous as *Persepolis*. Furthermore, the themes of religion and politics are more prevalent in *Persepolis*. There are no official documents from the Iranian government against Satrapi's other works.

<sup>10</sup> In an interview with Weiss (n. d.), Satrapi confirmed the importance of Iran's contemporary history. Yet her intention was to tell her story in a form appealing to most and not requiring previous knowledge - namely, the form of the graphic novel.

<sup>11</sup> In one of her interviews, Satrapi declared: "the image that I have of Iran today is mixed so much with my melancholy and my nostalgia that I can't have a fair point of view" (Satrapi in Walt, 2008).

and regardless of its personal, intimist nature, her work continues to inform discourses on Iran and Islamic culture globally and been presented in most media coverage as a “true rendition” of Iran’s recent ‘history’.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, *Persepolis* has been used as a didactic tool in many educational institutions around the world especially at a scholarly level (at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels).<sup>13</sup> *The New York Times* reports that: “*Persepolis* is taught in 118 colleges in the United States, including West Point, according to Pantheon, its publisher — and taken part in a larger conversation about the book’s global resonances” (Hohenadel in *The New York Times*, 2007). According to Chambers, “It is misleading to identify individuals as being somehow emblematic of the history of a whole nation” (Chambers, 2013, p. 5). In this regard, *Persepolis* should not have been presented in educational contexts or media as representative of the whole Iranian society. A critical reading of what has not been represented, or what has been presented as ‘truth’ (and accepted as such) proves extremely useful in the analysis of *Persepolis* as a ‘true rendition’ and a ‘personal story’.

The first level of inquiry is one built on the analysis of *Persepolis* in general. This will serve to present the text, the perception of the problem it delivers, and its style, i.e. the way Satrapi has chosen to talk about her country and her culture. Needless to say that, Satrapi’s book is not a *history* of Iran, but an Iranian *story*. Satrapi has long been concerned about stereotyped propaganda against Iran. In one of her interviews, she was asked by a journalist about the reason for writing her book. “Because you didn’t make good your job!” (Tempesta, 2005). She, also added in an interview with *Asia Society* (n.d.) that: “for me there were so many misunderstandings, and so many mistakes concerning my country that I wanted to tell the story in a way that people would understand it better”. According to Satrapi, *Persepolis* “was really a shout, like, please, come on, I will tell you how it was!” (Satrapi in Shaikh, n.d.). She informs us that she chose the name *Persepolis* to draw the world’s attention on Iran beyond the borders of the Islamic Republic,<sup>14</sup> which along with ‘fundamentalism’<sup>15</sup> and “terrorism” is

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<sup>12</sup> Mondello (2007) describes the film directed by Satrapi as a “nuanced view of social issues,” while Satrapi notes that *Persepolis* is just her partial and *personal* account. See also Howell who states that *Persepolis* represents the whole history of Middle East (2008). Similar views are observable from Charity (2008) and Travers (2007). Calhoun (2007) believes that “*Persepolis* is realism seen through special eyes”. According to LaSalle, although *Persepolis* is personal, history and culture of Iran remain as the core argument. This put Satrapi’s work beyond the borders of an autobiography (LaSalle, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> From author’s personal experience at the University of Manchester where *Persepolis* has been used as a learning tool in discussions of analysis of the Iranian culture and history at the postgraduate level.

<sup>14</sup> “By naming her memoir with the Western name for this pre-Islamic city central to Iranian identity, [...] to the current Islamic regime, Satrapi symbolically identifies her work as Western in name only, but deeply, truly Persian, a political gesture aimed at an Islamic regime which refuses Iran’s diversity of opinions and identities” (Leservot, 2011, p. 128).

<sup>15</sup> The term ‘fundamentalism’ can be found in a number of sources as well as in media. It is not confined to Islam. Fundamentalism may be defined in political contexts. The notion of activism is closely related to fundamentalism in a way which might justify the militant aspect of the term. Generally, fundamentalism carries a sort of intolerance and denial towards other beliefs. In Burrell’s words:

the focal point of attention of world media (Satrapi in Farahmandi, n.d.). The role of media, it so appears, is a pivotal one in informing and disseminating stereotypical and propagandistic accounts on Iran. This, I concur with Satrapi, should neither be ignored nor underestimated. From its beginnings as a graphic novel written in French by an Iranian leftist young girl in 2002, *Persepolis* has become a global bestseller translated in several languages, and advertised as a denouncement by an oppressed Iranian girl struggling against the tyranny of the Iranian Revolution and the Islamic Republic. To this, one should add Satrapi's loss of control of her work, which is particularly notable following its success at the 2007 Cannes Film Festival to Random House Group (one of the largest book publishing houses) and Sony Pictures Classics who define the meaning of *Persepolis* globally. This then depends exclusively on the capitalist agenda of the global market. It can be argued that in such context, *Persepolis* loses its poetry and becomes the *Bildungsroman* of a young girl who struggles with a tyrannical, non-democratic and gender-oppressive regime.<sup>16</sup> Advertised as such, the dramatic experiences of Satrapi are passed onto millions and, like other graphic novels set in Afghanistan or Bosnia, they align with a campaign against rouge countries in the name of, amongst the other things, women oppressed by *mollahs* (Iranian clergies).

Looking through the critical lenses of a personal memoir and criticising governmental policies, as it is argued by Iranian officials, *Persepolis* has reinforced stereotypical and highly politicised propaganda against Iran. The film adaption "turned into a political event at Cannes 2007" and "the fact that France decided to enter this particular film for the Oscars [mostly] accentuates the political side of the film" (Shalmani, 2008). The Iranian government, including members of its clergy, condemned both the book and the animated film in March 2007. Mahdi Kalhor, Presidential Advisor on Media Affairs, declared that "*Persepolis* is Islamophobic" (Barzegar, 2012, p. 22).<sup>17</sup> In an interview with Fars News Agency, Kalhor stated that:

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"Fundamentalism is clearly more likely to produce an atmosphere of confrontation rather than cooperation; but it need not inevitably do so" (1989, p. 5). In this thesis, I sometimes quote the term "fundamentalism" directly from different contexts which discuss the abuse of power by Islamic government agents in Iran. This, however, might not make sense in defining the Iranian political system. 'Foundationalism' as a view "that all knowledge and justified belief rest ultimately on a foundation of non-inferential knowledge or justified belief" could be replaced with 'fundamentalism' in the case of Iran (Fumerton, 2010). Foundationalism explains the structure of Khomeini's political thought which is "dependent on some other beliefs that are known or justifiably believed" (Poston, n.d.), i.e. the deputyship of a jurist which is derived from the right of *velayat* for the infallible Imams.

<sup>16</sup> The term "regime" is used throughout this thesis to refer to the Iranian Islamic Republic system of government. This is due to the fact that some authors and post-revolutionary memoirists refer to the post-Khomeini government as totalitarian, fanatic and sometimes politically corrupt that impose Islamic rules on people and apply them at social level.

<sup>17</sup> The concept of Islamophobia is a vast one, and "fails to distinguish between race and religion." (Cf. Sayyid. S., & Vakil A. K., 2010, pp. 10-35). "[It] could reasonably be applied to any setting in which people hate Muslims, or fear Islam, but the word is most frequently invoked, and has its richest connotations, when it is used to describe a sentiment that flourishes in contemporary Europe and North

Cannes' attention to *Persepolis* is in line with the fight against Islam by the French: *Islam setizi*. The battle against Islam in Western art and media started in France. Producing the anti-Iranian film, *Persepolis*, and it being awarded a prize at the Cannes Film Festival is in line with battling against Islam. From the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries onwards, challenging the religion and faith started in France. It first started with Christianity and after a short time the attention was given to Islam. Voltaire's prejudiced description and attacks against Prophet Muhammad is of this kind. This challenge has been followed in a new way by *A Journey to Persia* by Jean Chardin. The French wickedness, today, is of the similar nature (Kalhor in Fars News Agency, 2007).

Kalhor added that the film *Persepolis*, just like other pop culture products (e.g. the 2007 movie *300* by Zack Snyder), "is aimed at demolishing the Iranian culture", and will not be the last anti-Iranian movie (Kalhor in Fars News Agency, 2007). Feelings were exacerbated when Satrapi's film, *Persepolis*, was awarded the Jury Prize.<sup>18</sup> "Ali Akbar Velayati, former foreign minister and adviser to the supreme leader,<sup>19</sup> Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei, said the French-produced film is another example of US attempts to 'encourage forces opposed to the authorities in any way possible'" (Mfpietro, 2012). It so appears that the situation is radically different in Iran. *Persepolis* is banned and, since 2007, Satrapi has not been allowed entry to the country on account of *Islam setizi*.

Reactions to the reception of *Persepolis* in Iran can be placed into three broad groups. The first group includes the Iranian wealthy, educated and "Westernised" bourgeoisie. This broadly corresponds to Satrapi's background, as well as that of most post-revolutionary writers. Their secular (not necessarily nationalistic) ideas have divergent directions from the school of Khomeini. Their perception of *Persepolis* is very close to that of audiences in "Western" Europe and the United States primarily, and their views on the Shi'a Islamic Republic more or less match that offered by contemporary "Western" media. The main argument against the current Iranian government and leadership involves accusations of

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America" (Shryock, 2010, p. 2). "Islamophobia rose markedly after the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>" (Driel, 2004, p. 164), while *Islam setizi* is a special term coined by Iranian officials.

<sup>18</sup> Ali Reza Rezadad, the managing director of Farabi Cinematic Affairs, complained to the French ambassador in Iran, Mr Vincent Grimoire: "The Cannes Festival has chosen *Persepolis*, in a false act, as the candidate for the Jury Prize. *Persepolis* is an unrealistic and faulty representation of the values of the Islamic Revolution of Iran. The Cannes Festival, with this action, has indeed ignored other valuable Iranian films and clearly supported imperialistic and hegemonic policies. This is absolutely against their freedom of speech and free thinking mottos. Not choosing other valuable Iranian films can be remitted, but is such an anti-political and anti-cultural action tolerable?" (Rezadad in Fars News Agency, 2007). Masoud Dehnamaki, the celebrated Iranian film director, also publicly announced that: "Satrapi is indeed the West's new anti-cultural project against Iran and acclaiming *Persepolis* in Cannes shows that the Western anti-cultural action against Iran is pre-systematised" (2007).

<sup>19</sup> "In the absence of a true Imamate, leadership of the state is passed to a single executive, the *vali-e faqih*, or Supreme Leader. [...] According to the constitution, the Supreme Leader is responsible for 'general policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran' which include all aspects of domestic and foreign policies. [...] Since the revolution, there have been only two Supreme Leaders of the Islamic Republic: Ayatollah Khomeini held this office until his death in 1989, and his successor, Ali Khamenei, was appointed to the position by the Assembly of Experts shortly afterwards" (Alexander and Hoenig, 2008, p. 13).

corruption and disregard for democratic procedures and human rights. *Persepolis*, with its outspoken denouncements of dictatorial methods and various forms of oppression, fits this frame. Other examples are filtered inside Iran by means of new media (chiefly, the internet). This group (Iranian dissidents, artists and intellectuals living outside Iran) according to Dabashi stayed out of their homeland and “speak vehemently against the state repression in Iran” (Dabashi, 2013).

The second group is one vociferously in favour of secular nationalism. Just like Satrapi, they advocate the separation of religion and politics. Accordingly, Khomeini’s interpretation of the principle of *velayat-e faqih* is a controversial issue which eventually must be rejected. They mostly hold anti-imperialist ideals. They might not have strong religious ties with their country but “the overwhelming majority of them opted for a full recognition of the dignified limits of what they could say or do from abroad and never joined the bandwagon of [those] plotting against their own homeland” (Dabashi, 2013). This group believes that Satrapi has provoked orientalist and new colonialist formulations while, at the same time, worldwide popularity and economic gain have forced her to sacrifice her ethical responsibilities towards her country. To the second nationalist anti-imperialist group belongs a sub-group that can be classified as religious intellectuals. This group “opted for a life in exile and began authoring a massive body of literature that cast a categorical shadow of illegitimacy over the entire course of the Islamic Republic” (Dabashi, 2013). This group, including a number of Shi’a *olama*, believes in religion and politics as two separate domains. What is important to them is Iran and Islamic culture beyond Khomeini’s doctrine. From within this group of voices, Satrapi has been approved for representing the shortcomings of the Iranian Revolution, and has been criticised for her limited and one-dimensional representation of Iranian Islamic culture.

In the third group we find those whose ideals have been shaped by religious doctrine and reinforced by the Islamic Revolution. Just like the Iranian government, they keep Khomeini’s standards and would rate Satrapi and her work as *Islam setiz* (Farsi. ‘Hostile towards Islam’) and anti-Iranian (in terms of revolutionary values). For instance, Mohammad Ghorbani (2010), an Iranian lecturer and blogger, states that *Persepolis* is carefully insinuating negative propaganda against Iran. He believes the book represents Iranian society as the hopeless and suffocating effect of the revolution. According to Ghorbani, *Persepolis* is against Islamic values, notably those surrounding modesty such as the *hejab*. The veil is represented in *Persepolis* as a sign of oppression against women’s freedom, and is introduced as a limitation. *Persepolis* thus reinforces stereotypical views of Islam in general, and is turned into a weapon produced by an Iranian against Iran. In short, the reception of Satrapi’s work and other post-revolutionary autobiographical narratives is contextualised within anti-Iranian critique among most of revolutionary Iranians. According to Iranian officials, the trauma she

suffered, is imposed on all Iranians, particularly Iranian women, and in so doing, it silences those whose visions diverge from Satrapi's, as well as the political and social system which Iran has decided to adopt by means of a revolution.<sup>20</sup>

The informal tone and the form of autobiography have made *Persepolis* and other post-revolutionary memoirs accessible works. Blending personal experiences with social commentary, they object to and criticise the 'totalitarianism' of the Iranian government with the authority of their global success, and their much-advertised insider privileged position. The majority of memoirs I examine in this thesis have been intended to address a particular type of audience, i.e. non-Iranians, and, often, non-Muslims. As best-selling memoirs, these narratives have enjoyed immediate and enduring success.<sup>21</sup> Alternatively, they have emerged in the aftermath of international prizes, thus contributing to the enhancement of the fame of their authors.<sup>22</sup> This is confirmed by the decision of the Iranian government to ban *Persepolis*, a policy implemented after the release and success of the movie, and not the graphic novel. As it turned out, the Iranian government's banishment of the book has appeared to become public four years later than the publication date. Based on the reports of Fars News Agency, the condemnation of *Islam setizi* has only appeared after the film's successful victory in Cannes Film Festival in France.<sup>23</sup> Hossein Derakhshan has noted this in his blog. He analyses Satrapi's representations of her country and personal experiences, as issues of political significance that give a new meaning to her graphic narrative (Derakhshan, 2007). Yet, the new political meaning is not necessarily created by the book only. The commercial and economic system

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<sup>20</sup> It is worth noting that most issues are neither sufficiently problematized nor contextualised. Policies on the *hejab*, for instance, are straightforwardly presented as oppressive. The average "Western" readership is generally inclined to agree with such a perspective. However, in order to inform a fair debate on the *hejab*, a number of historical and social details should be given (e.g. *kashf-e hejab* - the compulsory "removing of the veil" during the reign of the Shah, the political meaning of the *hejab* in pre- and post-revolutionary Iran, and the philosophy of the *hejab* in Islam). It can be appreciated that a memoir is not a work of scholarship. However, one may wonder why Iranian scholars, as well as various intellectual figures, did not hesitate to present it as a non-realistic narrative on Iran and Shi'a Islam.

<sup>21</sup> *Reading Lolita in Tehran* remained in *The New York Times* bestseller list for more than 117 weeks and has been translated into thirty-two languages. It won several major literary awards (Mahmood, 2011, p. 80).

<sup>22</sup> In 2003, Shirin Ebadi became the first Iranian woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize. She published *Iran Awakening* in 2007. *Persepolis* too has won many prizes. The most important is the Cannes Film Festival Jury Prize in 2007, awarded for 'best animated movie' after the book's adaptation into an animated movie under the joint direction of Satrapi herself and Vincent Paronnaud. Betty Mahmoody, author of *Not without My Daughter* (1987), received an honorary degree from Alma College in Michigan and the Outstanding Woman of the Year Award in 1990 from Oakland University (Paige, 2008).

<sup>23</sup> The harsh and severe position of Iranian officials four years after the publication of *Persepolis* is more comprehensible through an understanding of the role of the "world's media-wife" (Axworthy, 2013, p. xvii). It seems that the popularity of Satrapi's work has been intensified through the media, especially after its adaptation into an animated movie. The Cannes Jury Prize and the media manoeuvre appeared to be of central importance to the Iranian government, rather than *Persepolis* itself.

behind the publication of a successful book, and the broadcasting of the film have both contributed to the affirmation of a different political meaning.

Satrapı declared that her work is a 'love letter' to her family and to her country.<sup>24</sup> This view reflects her feelings towards Iran. In *Persepolis*, she unambiguously makes the point that she is Iranian, and proud of it (Satrapı, 2003, p. 197). Moreover she has said that *Persepolis* (the movie) "is about peace and love" (Satrapı in Abramowitz, 2007). It is also notable that "after winning the jury prize, in a shared award with Mexican director Carlos Reygadas' *Silent Light*,' Satrapı, who co-helmed with Vincent Paronnaud, dedicated her prize 'to all Iranians'" (Jaafar, 2007). The *intentio auctoris* is a feature that distinguishes Satrapı's work from those of other memoir-writers, whose autobiographies are uncompromising in their representations of revolutionary Iran. For example, Nafisi (2003) and Mahmoody (1987) openly and directly criticise Iran and the imposition of Islamic laws<sup>25</sup>.

From a close reading of *Persepolis* and similar autobiographical narratives,<sup>26</sup> it emerges that dissident artists and intellectuals give voice to some Iranians' concerns about matters of governmental policies that limit their individual freedom. The notion of individual freedom, we are given to believe, is embedded in a democratic system.<sup>27</sup> Hans Kelsen believes the individual rights as freedom of choice ought to be protected by law (Habermas, 1996, p. 86). Individual freedom has gradually become associated with the doctrine that freedom of choice should be applied to matters as diverse as religion and politics (Held, 2013, p. 14). According to Rahimi, the Islamic Republic "marked an attempt to create a new order [law] based on a new vision of political spirituality" (2012, p. 56) to protect the conditions of social and political

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<sup>24</sup> "I can live fifty years in France and my affection will always be with Iran. I always say that if I were a man I might say that Iran is my mother and France is my wife. My mother, whether she's crazy or not, I would die for her, no matter what - she is my mother. She is me and I am her. My wife I can cheat on with another woman, I can leave her, I can also love her and make her children, I can do all of that but it's not like with my mother. But nowhere is my home any more. I will never have any home any more" (Satrapı in Tully, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> Needless to say that the fact that the other authors don't explicitly label their works as expressions of "love" does not make them more hostile to Iran. In particular, Ebadi falls in the second group of secular nationalists with strong anti-imperialist tendencies. Ebadi's case is thus different from that of Nafisi or Mahmoody here.

<sup>26</sup> Works like *Not without My Daughter* (1987) by Betty Mahmoody, *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003) by Azar Nafisi, *Iran Awakening* (2007) by Shirin Ebadi, *Persepolis 2.0* (2009) by Payman & Sina and *Zahra's Paradise* (2011) by Amir and Khalil are very popular. They are believed to be matter-of-fact in their representation of Iran in that they bear witness to several facts of Iran's history, culture and socio-political (Shi'a) system. Along with Satrapı's *Persepolis*, the main object of investigation in the present study, I will examine a series of narratives that share structural and semantic similarities with Satrapı's acclaimed graphic novel and have therefore informed popular representations of Iran in contemporary culture. The reputation of all these works, and of their authors, seems to depend on their sense of battling Iran, the Iranian government and Iran's socio-political system.

<sup>27</sup> Lefort believes that despite all the vices, democracy is still "the only desirable form of society, because it preserves the double idea of political freedom and the freedom of individual" (1988, p. 181).

life after the revolution. This intensifies the tension between “the claims of individuality on one hand, and the power requisite for the state to ensure peaceful and commodious living on the other” (Held, 2013, p. 15). Satrapi presents herself from the very beginning as an individualist, who challenges the rules and regulations implemented on the community of believers (Farsi. *omat-e Islami*)<sup>28</sup> by the government. Promoting individual liberty, which falls in line with Satrapi’s concerns, is the main problem of residing in a political system which maintains the order, “by ensuring the protection of the security of all” (Lefort, 1988, p. 172). In such a system, as Tocqueville notes, “individuals seem of less and society of greater importance; or rather, every citizen, being assimilated to all the rest, is lost amongst the crowd and nothing stands conspicuous but the great and imposing image of the people at large” (Tocqueville as cited in Lefort, 1988, p. 177). Satrapi’s critical position towards the *hejab*, and designing her own *hejab* style is a confirmation of her orientation towards individual uniqueness *vis-a-vis* the assimilated image of community at large.

### **Methodology**

Methods of investigation in this thesis are primarily informed by the theoretical and conceptual issues in the study of religion and history. The very concept of religion or history includes other intellectual and epistemological developments. Feminism, Orientalism<sup>29</sup> and Occidentalism are examples of such developments. Based on the complex nature of most of the events discussed in this thesis, relying on one method only will not achieve strong results. As the result, a multi-methodological approach is required to a substantial commitment to the issues of research. For a relatively well-established order in presenting the various methods of this research, each of the methods will be separately defined. It is understood that some of the methods used in this thesis (e.g. orientalism) are more helpful than others to analyse data. However, not all issues in this research can be analysed through the lens of orientalism. Occidentalism and standpoint theory (as the subject of critique is autobiography) could yield a more solid and successful work.

### **Orientalism**

The term ‘orientalism’ – unambiguously associated with the 1978 study of Edward Said – has long been used by many critics in the field of cultural studies and post-colonial theory.

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<sup>28</sup> According to Geaves, Gabriel, Haddad, and Smith (2004), the concept of *ummah* can be used at different levels: “the village, the town, the nation and the world. In all these concentric levels the group is more important than the individual. [...] thus individual and factional interests gave way to the interests of the community as a whole” (p. 15).

<sup>29</sup> Throughout this thesis, I will refer to the critical discourse made popular by Edward Said as ‘orientalism’. Conversely, the spelling *Orientalism* or *Occidentalism* (with capital ‘O’), indicates Said’s 1978 work.



Orientalism, according to Said (1978), is “a rationalization of colonial rule” and a form of “knowledge reinforced by the colonial encounter” (p. 39). The structure of orientalism is based on the difference between the “West”<sup>30</sup> or the Occident as familiar or ‘us’ and the “East” or the Orient as unfamiliar or ‘them’. Orientalising the Orient becomes possible through its difference from the “West” (p. 3). “The Orient was seen as essentially ancient, exotic and absurd, the land of despots and mystics, populated by a backward population of supine men and subordinated and silent women” (Afshar, 2008, p. 412). Assuming the binary oppositions between the Orient and the Occident leads to considering the “East” as “brain-dead, narrow minded, incapable of thinking, hypocritical, desperately tribal [...], literalist, rigid, intolerant, totalitarian, anti-Semitic, and hateful of women and homosexuals” (Mahmood, 2011, p. 83). The Occident, on the other hand is praised unstintingly through its long history for rationality, knowledge, discovery and open-mindedness (Mahmood, 2011, p. 83). The most important characteristic of this mode of thinking is regarding women as victims of patriarchy and religious fundamentalism. This means that “Eastern” women need their “Western” sisters or politicians to rescue them (Bahramitash, 2005, p. 222). Another equally significant feature of orientalism in Bahramitash’s words is assuming all Muslim women as similar who suffer from the same condition (2005, p. 222).

Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony can be best understood in line with the idea of the superiority of the “West”. Gramsci argues that the hegemonic knowledge is a set of thoughts that represents the interests of a dominant group or class (Gramsci as cited in Bahramitash, 2005, p. 222). This dominant group, according to him, mostly consists of intellectuals, elites and members of upper-middle class, who have the knowledge to control and dominate the structure of civil society. Foucault’s notion of ‘true discourse’ is complementing Gramsci’s discourse. When knowledge is supported by dominant power, it becomes the true discourse, neither through force and coercion nor through consent, but through methods “which infiltrate minds and bodies, cultural practices which cultivate behaviours and beliefs, tastes, desires, and needs as seemingly naturally occurring qualities and properties embodied in the psychic and physical reality” (Smart, 1994, p. 210). Hegemonic discourses are assumed not only in terms of faith and culture but also in terms of intellectuality.

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<sup>30</sup> The terms “West”, “Western”, “Westerners”, “East”, “Eastern”, “European” and “Islam” are repeated throughout this thesis. According to Edward Said (1997, p. 7): “labels purporting to name very large and complex realities are notoriously vague and at the same time unavoidable”. Therefore: “they are not merely loose descriptions, but words which come laden with heavy historical and ideological baggage ... they are still often used to underpin pejorative or flattering stereotypes and ... they mask the real heterogeneity and variabilities of all the entities which they purport to denote” (Flood, Huchings, Miazhevich & Nickels, 2012, p. 3).

On this basis, the “East” will be automatically categorized as “a subject race” (Said, 1995, p. 206) that needs the “West” to be developed and intellectually represented.

It is argued that the biased representation of Iran and Islam amongst non-Iranians in the “West” is a contemporary form of the old orientalist discourse, where Iran and Islam are the subjects. According to Keshavarz, neo orientalism “replicates the totalizing – and silencing – tendencies of the old Orientalists by virtues of erasing, through unnuanced narration, the complexity and richness in the local culture” (Keshavarz, 2007, p. 3). *Persepolis* has been read by *intentio lectoris* (either by Iranian officials or media, feminist circles and academics) as contemporary incarnations of this specific mode of thinking, in that it is called a “New Orientalist narrative” (Keshavarz, 2007, p. 2).<sup>31</sup> Based on the official Iranian announcement, *Persepolis* seems to fit this pattern. The success of *Persepolis*, Iranian officials believe, depends in large measure on the way in which the author plays with similar misunderstandings. When Satrapi points at images of the *hejab* as brutally imposed on women, including young pupils in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution, the general reader is lured into an unfamiliar universe inevitably stigmatised by stereotypes. In so doing, Satrapi seems to promote a stereotypical rendition of Islam and Iran - an operation that is in similar ways a perpetuation of Said’s Orientalism. *Persepolis* is discussed as offering personal testimonies against Islamic regulations in Iran, while condemning Iranian Islamic policies and advocating the rights of individuals. And, most importantly, it is argued that *Persepolis* looks at the *shari’ah* as the symbol of the limitations imposed on her individual freedom.

The common terrain from which most of these autobiographical narratives move is the suffering of women at the hands of Islam. The genre of autobiography has played a pivotal role in securing a simple argument: “women are the most abject victims of the ideology of Islamic fundamentalism” (Mahmood, 2011, p. 79). Mistreatment of women, gender inequality, misogynist practices, domestic violence and political victimology are recurring themes in such works. The solution to these problems lies in liberating the Muslim woman from oppressive patriarchal culture with a call on democracy, reforming Islam, secular politics and empowering her with a more female friendly exegesis of the Qur’an. ‘Islamic fundamentalism’ has concerned many imperial powers, European feminists, politicians and media pundits to diagnose the problem and propose solutions in “restructuring large swaths of the Muslim population, if not the religion itself” (Mahmood, 2011, p. 78). This legitimises the extension of colonial rule and justifies the geopolitical domination in the name of War on Terror in the Middle East. Since the events of 9/11, “US President George W. Bush has frequently campaigned to save the ‘civilized world from evil’” (Bahramitash, 2005, p. 221). According

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<sup>31</sup> The term new or neo orientalism, especially in this research, is derived from Keshavarz’s *Jasmin and Star* (2007).

to Bahramitash, the military action in Afghanistan was supported by a feminist cause i.e. to rescue the oppressed Afghan women. In the case of Iran, Hersch believes that the post-revolutionary autobiographical narratives such as Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* paved the way to the politics of the White House, and confirmed the Iranian position as a member of the "axis of evil and neoconservative plans to attack Iran were made public" (Hersch, 2006). Mahmood also argues that the personal testimonies of the victimised autobiographers against the Islamic policies -in particular the veil- played a key role in securing the public opinion against the veil, and the "passage of the controversial law banning the display of the veil (and another 'conspicuous' religious symbols) in public schools" in France (2001, p. 81). The first person account of an Iranian dissident Chahdorrt Djavann about the veil,<sup>32</sup> Mahmood continues, "reportedly moved the presiding officials to tears" (2001, p. 81). Consequently, representations by Satrapi and others memoirists can be argued to have provided the background for a demonised depiction of Islam by media, especially after the 9/11 event. According to Mahmood, this genre of literature received international media attention with the "theme of abhorrence of everything Muslim and sheer exaltation of all things Western" (2011, p. 86). Mahmood believes that the arguments of these authors read like a legitimate voice to put Islam and the "West" in confrontation (Mahmood, 2011, p. 79). In other words, the native testimonials legitimize Islamophobia and Iranophobia, giving credibility to the stereotypes and prejudices sweeping the world today.

It is argued that *Persepolis* along with other post-revolutionary memoirs with their sense of victimising women have reinforced the essentialist notions of Islam. This contributes to re-inscribe the separation of Islam from politics that has become the bedrock for secular and neoconservative politics. As Mohanty put it, authors like Satrapi and other autobiographers are very likely as "First World" women, to share their experiences of their fellow country women, who are unmistakably associated to a stereotypical portrayal of the "Third World" (Mohanty, 2007, p. 17). Mohanty argues that the category of "Third World" woman is the colonial production of liberal feminism. In her critique of liberal feminism, Mohanty claims that the superiority of the "West" is a shared vocabulary for many feminists which corresponds to produce a universal image. This image "defines Third World women as subjects outside social terrains [...], legal, economic, religious, and familial structures are treated as phenomena to be judged by Western standards" (2003, p. 40). Also, "Third World" women are automatically defined as "religious (read: not progressive), family-oriented (read: traditional), legally unsophisticated (read: they are still not conscious of their rights), illiterate (read: ignorant), domestic (read: backward), and sometimes revolutionary (read: their country

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<sup>32</sup> "I wore the veil for ten years. It was the veil or death. I know what I am talking about" see *Bas les voiles* (2003).

is in a state of war; they must fight!)” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 40). Based on Mohanty’s polemical argument, Satrapi and other memoirists, who are understood by their self-valorisation as members of upper middle class educated in America, and the “West “Europe demonstrate the situation and experience of their fellow country women “as tied closely to their class position” (Bahramitash, 2005, p. 232). Their identity shows a kind of social superiority. As members of Iranian elites, these authors experience the Iranian revolution differently in terms of their social class. For example, the imposition of the *hejab* in post-revolutionary Iran definitely restricted their individual freedom, while for the majority of Iranian women in working class with low income, the *hejab* was an opportunity to appear in public from which they have been previously excluded. Mohanty’s path-breaking argument is relevant here: the representation of “Third World” women as a homogenous group is remarkably problematic, as this might end up with the exclusion of the majority of Iranian women from the homogenous picture Satrapi and other memoirists represented, i.e. victims of the state policies in Iran. The elites’ experiences, thus, could not be generalised to all Iranian women.

The scholars discussed above warn us to read Satrapi and other’s description of Iran with much more care and scepticism, for their lack of understanding of the situation of the overwhelming majority of Iranian women. These authors’ point of views are considered as ‘outsiders’ which hardly explain the experience of their fellow citizens. Authors of post-revolutionary memoirs, like Satrapi, Shirin Ebadi and Azar Nafisi, are all “Western” educated Iranian women from wealthy upper or middle class backgrounds, with the themes mostly revolving around “the cosmopolitan elite privileged under the regime of Shah and disinherited by the revolution” (Whitlock, 2008, p. 10). They professionally choose their readership and their style which is also engaging with middle-class readers (Whitlock, 2008, p. 16). As argued by Nash, authors of this class might have racial connections with Muslim women, however, “they construct Islam and Muslims - whether traditionalist or revivalist - by employing recycled Orientalist tropes cast in the insider’s voice” (2012, p. 26). A prominent feature of orientalism is the tendency to differentiate between “us” and “them”. Their autobiographies limit the probability of integration with Iranian women and themselves, and “cannot avoid the challenge of situating” themselves in a hegemonic framework (Mohanty, 2007, p. 20). This can be traced in their background as “Western” educated, upper middle-class elites, who are in minority in comparison with the majority of Iranian women who belong to the working class and are socially conservative and religious. It is argued that, their representations retain the superiority of “Western” and “Eurocentric” over Oriental women. Satrapi’s wealthy background and royal heritage<sup>33</sup> has probably sharpened her distance from the rest of the

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<sup>33</sup> She is a member of the former royal family. Her grandfather was a prince of the Qajar dynasty before the rise of the Pahlavis (Cf. Satrapi, 2003, p. 22).

society (Satrapi, 2003, p. 6). Accordingly, her account of her country is her personal viewpoint and can be different from the majority of the society. As Harding argues, “knowledge is supposed to be based on experiences, and so different experiences should enable different perceptions of ourselves and our environment” (2004, p. 7). For example, while Satrapi’s concern is the imposition of the *hejab* at the public level in post-revolutionary Iran, many other Iranians were not concerned about it as they used to wear it before the revolution. In other words, in discourses of oppression and patriarchy, especially in the post-revolutionary autobiographical accounts, there is the danger of associating Iran with the orientalist discussions that can lead to devaluing of being Iranian as “non-Western” ways of being (Seedat, 2013, p. 29).

Following the revolution, Dabashi argues, representation of the Islamic Republic of Iran as “an atrocious record of stifling, silencing, and outright murdering secular intellectuals, while systematically and legally creating a state of gender apartheid” in line with “acts of propaganda and disinformation” has been promoted as “elements of truth” in the accounts of “native informers and insiders” (Dabashi, 2006, p. 5). However, according to Iranian scholars like Marandi and Pirnajmuddin (2009),

In the eyes of many Iranian intellectuals, such writers are often viewed as examples of the Iranian intellectual comprador class or members of the *gharbzadeh* (a term made current by Jalal Ale-Ahmad, the Iranian critic and intellectual, that can be rendered in English as Westernised, West-struck, or Westomaniac), rather than as intellectuals (p. 23).

Axworthy (2013) believes that, Ale-Ahmad’s coinage was not meant to challenge “Western” culture and values, but to criticise the way “Western”-based ideals had been promoted by some Iranians who locate themselves outside Iranian mainstream culture, and are seen by many as either non-Muslim or non-Iranian (p. 60). The spirit of intolerance towards such writers and intellectuals among many Iranians is one fostered by the belief that Satrapi, and others have purposely misrepresented or misrepresented their indigenous culture, and have promoted “Western” values and standards that are at odds with Iran and (Shi’a) Islam. The function of these intellectuals was not to expose the atrocities but rather “to take the element of truth and package it in a manner that serves the belligerent empire best: in the disguise of a legitimate critic of localised tyranny facilitating the operation of a far more insidious global domination” (Dabashi, 2006, pp. 5-6).

The orientalist analysis in this research is informed by the works of Said (1978, 1997), Keshavarz (2007),<sup>34</sup> Dabashi (2006, 2013),<sup>35</sup> Marandi (2009, 2011),<sup>36</sup> Bahramitash (2005a, 2005b),<sup>37</sup> Nash (2012, 2013),<sup>38</sup> Mahmood (2011),<sup>39</sup> Barzegar (2012)<sup>40</sup> and other scholars who have contributed to the critique of “Western” hegemonic discourses.

Focusing specifically on *Persepolis*, the most successful of the post-revolutionary narratives addressed herein, it is clear that Satrapi’s personal and political perspective (with its focus on the Islamic aspects of the Iranian revolution, the war with Iraq and the *hejab* as gender-exploitation) is conveniently exploited at a global level. There is also a counter-argument to the neo orientalist interpretation of Satrapi’s work. Quite opposite to the orientalist representations of *Persepolis*, Hillary Chute states that: “*Persepolis* is able of destabilizing tropes of ‘East’ and ‘West’ [ . . . ] rather than reinforcing them” (Chute, as cited in Madella, 2012, p. 2). Chute believes that the child language of *Persepolis* is a prominent factor in “subsuming the ‘exotic other’ into the ‘us’, erasing the ethnic, cultural, and class specificity of the book’s narrative”; Cawley admires *Persepolis* in the same way as Chute does. She says Satrapi’s public declarations, based on her aim of writing *Persepolis* for a “Western” audience, “can be read as an active postcolonial critique of Western representations of Iran and of people, particularly women, in Islamic countries in general” (Cawley, n.d.). In Chute’s words,

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<sup>34</sup> Fatemeh Keshavarz is professor of Persian Comparative Literature and chair of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Literatures at Washington University. In her *Jasmin and Stars* (2007), she “challenges popular perceptions of Iran as a society bereft of vitality and joy. Her fresh perspective on present-day Iran provides a rare insight into this rich culture alive with artistic expression but virtually unknown to most Americans” (UNC Press, 2014). The book is aimed as a critique of the new orientalist portrait of Iran in *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003) by Azar Nafisi.

<sup>35</sup> Hamid Dabashi is currently Professor of Iranian Studies and Comparative Literature at Columbia University. In this thesis, I have referred to his “Native informers and the making of the American empire” (2006) and “What happened to the Green Movement in Iran? The pro-democracy movement has receded from public space, but it remains a model for non-violent civil rights movements” (2013).

<sup>36</sup> Sayed Mohammad Marandi is an Iranian academic and political activist who is currently lecturing in the Faculty of World Studies at the University of Tehran. “Constructing an axis of evil: Iranian Memoirs in the ‘Land of the Free’” (2009a), “Reading Azar Nafisi in Tehran” (2008), “Western media representations, Iran, and Orientalist stereotypes” (2009b), “A Comparative reading of the Crusades and America’s Post 9/11 literature: Terrorist and the Falling Man - two American novels” (2011) are some of his papers that have been referenced in this research.

<sup>37</sup> Roksana Bahramitash is Visiting Scholar at the University of Montreal, Canada. She is the author of “Not just any dress: Narratives of memory, body, identity” (2005a), and “The war on terror, feminist Orientalism and Orientalist feminism: case studies of two North American bestsellers” (2005b), both of which have been used in this research.

<sup>38</sup> Geoffrey P. Nash is Senior Lecturer in English Studies at the University of Sunderland. His *Writing Muslim Identity* (2012) has been referenced extensively in this research. Some of his other works such as “New orientalism for old: articulations of the East in Raymond Schwab, Edward Said and two nineteenth-century French orientalists” (2013) has also been consulted.

<sup>39</sup> Saba Mahmood is Associate Professor in Social Cultural Anthropology at the University of Berkeley. Her “Feminism, sexuality, and the return of religion” (2011) was a good source of discussion in this research.

<sup>40</sup> Leila Barzegar is an Iranian critic whose master thesis “Persepolis & Orientalism: A critique of the reception history of Satrapi’s memoir” (2012) was the only orientalist critique of Satrapi’s work.

*Persepolis* challenges dominant stereotypes and historical narratives (2008, p. 94). Madella believes that,

*Persepolis* shows a critical view of the life in both places the East and the West, without making one being the saviour while the other the devil, and one way she does so is by telling her story, and as a diasporic she also questions spaces like home and exile (2012, p. 12).

As mentioned above, in a number of cases Satrapi declares that *Persepolis* is “a universal story. The background is Iran, but it is about everybody: family, love, exile, adolescence” (Satrapi in Johnston, 2007). This is because she believes “if America could make war in Iraq, it was because public opinion was so scared of Iraqis. They had been dehumanised. From the second you can identify with people, that’s much harder [making a war]” (Satrapi in Johnston, 2007). Satrapi frequently emphasises the humanistic message of *Persepolis*: “the human being anywhere is the same and they have the right to live because they have dreams, they have love, they have parents and kids, and the life of all of us is worth something” (Satrapi in Movieweb, 2010). Satrapi’s views and values are only *a* picture of Iran not *the* picture of Iran. Based on this and Satrapi’s *intentio auctoris* in writing *Persepolis*, and also in order to keep the balance between the accusations of the Islamic Republic of Iran and their critique of orientalist discourses in *Persepolis*, this thesis renders a dynamic interactions between the Iranian government and *Persepolis* by investigating the elements of both Orientalism and Occidentalism that impact on, and reshape the views around both. It is therefore of interest to consider a number of opposing literatures such as the Middle Eastern with “European” feminism, “Western” liberal with religious democracy and factual or fictionalised aspects of autobiographies.

### **Occidentalism**

Edward Said strongly interrogated intellectual and artistic representations of otherness in “European” thought. In such a way, he shifted the focus on “literary and cultural criticism from textuality to historicity, and from aesthetic to the political” (Behdad, 2010, p. 709). Said’s political theory of Orientalism has attracted many critics, challenging its “high humanism” (Behdad, 2010, p. 709). Ibn Warraq in his *Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said’s Orientalism* wrote that the discussions of orientalism<sup>41</sup> “seeks to convince not by arguments or historical analysis, but by spraying charges of racism, imperialism, and Eurocentrism from a moral high ground” (2007, p. 18). This moral high ground, Warraq believes, is the essential tactic of Said in justifying and defending his points and distorting the views of many eminent scholars. Occidentalism was first defined in 1995 by James Carrier as “essentializing

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<sup>41</sup> In Warraq’s opinion “Orientalism is also more generally ‘a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the Orient and (most of the time) Occident’” (2007, p. 19).

simplifications of the West that can potentially be involuntary” (Leservot, 2001, p. 118). It is argued by Hasan Hanafi that Occidentalism developed by the Orient and in the Orient as a way to revive the “non-Western” identity, and to study the “West” from “non-Western” point of view. Hanafi expresses that “Occidentalism is a discipline formed in Third World countries in order to complete the process of decolonization (especially cultural decolonization) and is based on military and economic issues” (as cited in Zabardast, 2015, p. 216). In Hanafi’s words, if orientalism is the centre, Occidentalism is the periphery. Elsherif argues, while in orientalism, the Orient is viewed from the Occident’s point, “Occidentalism seeks to undo the historical double complex controlling the I and the Other, the dialectical relation between the inferiority complex of the I and the megalomania of the Other” (Elsherif, 2015, p. 623). Regarding Satrapi’s *intentio auctoris* in writing *Persepolis* i.e. helping the “Western readers see Iranians as simply humans rather than vilified exotic others”, according to Leservot, the graphic novel actually hides orientalism and highlights Occidentalism (2011, p. 115). This means that Satrapi’s novel intends to counter orientalist narratives and could be seen as an example of Occidental discourses at least at the level of the *intentio auctoris*.

Following the Islamic Revolution of 1979, discourses on the “West” were quite various among Iranians. The history of Iran’s relationship with the “West” has “sufficient proof not only that various Occidentalism do exist [in Iran], but also that this phenomenon is not always born of an uneven (post)colonial relationship favouring the West” (Leservot, 2011, p. 118). As Leservot put it, Iranians can be divided into three different categories regarding their views towards the “West”. The first group is the remnants of the previous Pahlavi regime who are almost all “pro-Western” and non-Islamic. The second group, which is formed as an anti-Shah was the new Islamic revolutionary followers, who are totally “anti-Western” and the third group in between is the nineteenth and twentieth century’s Persian intellectuals who “actively encouraged the “Westernization” of Persia.<sup>42</sup> However, they always did so selectively, ensuring both that the Persian culture never became a copy of the “West and that ‘there never developed any systematic anti-Westernism in Iran’” (Boroujerdi as cited in Leservot, 2011, p. 119). This third group fits Satrapi and other autobiographers’ background. Their Occidentalism, as argued by Leservot, is never due to the colonial or imperial presence of the “West” in Iran; rather “as fundamentalist Islam became the new norm in the eighties in Iran, the Iranian elite and middle-class turned to Western culture for some relief” (Leservot, 2011,

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<sup>42</sup> In 1935, the Iranian officials requested other countries to call the country “Iran” instead of “Persia”. Iran and Persia are two manifestations of the same entity. For a detailed analysis “on the conceptual and political problems with using ‘Persian’ to denote a particular ethnic group or type of nationalism”, see Rasmus Christian Elling (2013), *Minorities in Iran: Nationalism and Ethnicity after Khomeini* (Christian Elling, 2012, p. 95).



p. 123). They tried to show “how Westernized Iranians are” and have interacted with the “Western” culture as an alternative to the imposed Islamic culture of Iran.

Satrapi’s nuanced look at the “Western” culture before and after the Islamic Revolution is considerable. The way she talks about “West” before the revolution is very different from her views after the revolution. In an illustration about world politics, she does not see “Western” power as the only dominant and superior. The Arab, Mongolian, Turks and the Persian Empire are all introduced and discussed at almost the same level as other powers. The “East” is not just passive and victimised rather a mostly powerful agent. She briefly mentions this in her autobiography: “2500 years of tyranny and submission as my father said. First our own emperors. Then the Arab invasion from the West. Followed by the Mongolian invasion from the East. And finally, modern Imperialism” (Satrapi, 2003, p. 11). She also asserts that it was the revolution that awakened people (Satrapi, 2003, p. 11). Yet, colonialism and invasions were not just perpetrated by the “West” but also by Arabs, Turks and Mongols. In fact, Satrapi’s interaction with “West” before the revolution is not just passively following “Western” objects and culture. It is more of an active engagement with “Western” ideology and lifestyle. Where she criticized Marx and Descartes’ philosophy, she is also aware of the Gandhi’s opposition to the British Empire and the Atatürk’s blind imitations of the “West”.<sup>43</sup>

Satrapi’s Occidentalism only disappears after the 1979 revolution when Iran undergoes a serious domestic and political changes. “As the revolutionary government upholds stricter and stricter Islamic rules, Western culture that circulates in Satrapi’s Iran becomes more and more cliché, and more and more appealing as a tool to resist the Islamic regime” (Leservot, 2011, p. 122). This sudden shift within Iran has changed the world’s view towards Iran and Iranians. Satrapi’s views towards her own country after the revolution put her in a position to embrace “Westernisation” more seriously than before. The more pressure she feels from the Islamic application of the rules by the state, the more she embraces “Westernisation”. Satrapi’s “Westernisation” is one of discouragement of Islamic policies of Iran, something mostly followed by “uneducated” in her words. Being raised with such attitudes and considering them as normal is more due to the Islamic revolutionary government than it is truly a product of the “Western” hegemony. Regarding the history of Iran’s relationship with the “West” and the Occidental orientation of the Iranian government, everything out of the context of Islam would be necessarily considered a sign of “Westernisation”. For example, wearing make-up in public

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<sup>43</sup> By revealing her readings, Satrapi promotes her childhood character as a member of a wealthy, educated, liberal-democrat-yet-flirting-with-Marxism elite: “I knew everything about the children of Palestine. About Fidel Castro. About the young Vietnamese killed by the Americans. About the revolutionaries of my country...But my favourite was a comic book entitled ‘Dialectic Materialism.’ In my book you could see Marx and Descartes” (Satrapi, 2003, p. 12). Satrapi’s father used to teach her about Gandhi in India, Atatürk in Turkey, the Bolsheviks, the dynasties before the Shah and the great Cyrus (Satrapi, 2003, p. 33).

or showing a few strands of hair can be attributed to the “Western” cultural hegemony. By illustration of the Iranian girls as American models, actresses and heroines, Satrapi shows that changing attitudes or socio-cultural dynamic within Iranian society to adopt “Western” fashion is conceived and done to counter the imposition of Islamic values on society. This seems to be the only way for most Iranian women to oppose the compulsory dress code applied by the Islamic government. She is thus surprised to encounter her friends’ rejection of Iranian culture. Although they have to abide by the rules of the *hejab*, “they all look like the heroines of American TV series, ready to get married at the drop of a hat, if the opportunity presented itself” (Satrapi, 2003, p. 259). Additionally, in an article of *The Guardian* newspaper, Satrapi reveals that:

Year by year, in Iran, women show a centimetre more hair, a centimetre less scarf. In my family I am the only brown-haired one now, because everyone, under their scarf, is blonde, they have bleached their hair. They have this bright pink lipstick, and prop their breasts up as high as they can (Satrapi in Addley, 2003).

Although Satrapi tries to show the opposition to the rules being applied by the Islamic government through showing Iranian women opposing the state policies on the *hejab* by dying their hair and wearing makeup, she finds this form of resistance (bleaching hair) a bit superficial. In fact, the second part of *Persepolis* points at a more nuanced reading of gender and veil issues. Satrapi’s Iranian friends and college classmates are able to go beyond the limits dictated by the law (Satrapi, 2003, p. 293). While her childhood and adolescence is dominated by descriptions of the veil as the epitome of governmental bullish rules and religious zealots, her return to Tehran opens up a different vista. After four years, she came back home disappointed by the freedom she experienced in “Europe”. This freedom, she eventually acknowledges once back in Iran, is just consumerism and lack of ideology. A similar scenario is true about young Iranian women who are fascinated by the transgressive element of “Western” culture. They are portrayed as intelligent, emancipated and critical thinkers. In fact, there is a change of perspective. This represents the different phases of the revolution with a very strict implementation of Islamic norms in the first decade after the revolution and then more pragmatic approaches after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini. Far from the traditional orientalist picture of “West”, the “West” in *Persepolis* is “reconstructed by Iranians not to respond to the West but to deal with their own (domestic) political issues” (Leservot, 2011, p. 126).

*Persepolis* works to educate its “Western” readers. As McIntosh argues, “identity is the fulcrum of *Persepolis*” (McIntosh, 2013, p. 7). The *intentio auctoris* is to clear the misconceptions around the Iranian identity in the “West”. The purpose and the identity are thus overlapping in *Persepolis*. “Satrapi articulately works to show her own perception of Iran,

and display the idea that people should refrain from defining the identity of a multi-dimensional entity such as a nation by a single institution such as a government” (McIntosh, 2013, p. 7). Effectively, Satrapi’s attempt is differentiating between the Iranian identity and the Iranian government. She tries to highlight the contrasts between the personal and public spheres of life in Iran as the public sphere is under harsh control of the government. As a child, little Marji cannot discern between religion and the tyranny of the government. She keeps rejecting to see and talk to God as she knows God as the main source of her traumas (Satrapi, 2003, p. 70), i.e. the execution of her beloved uncle. Later on, mostly in her adulthood, she only realises that she is actually “against fundamentalism [foundationalism in the case of Iran]...not against any religion, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity etc. It is the use of an ideology to kill people that [she is] against” (Satrapi in Hattenstone, 2008).<sup>44</sup> As the result, Satrapi’s concern over being a free agent in Iran originates from her views on the separation of religion and state.

Satrapi, like many others, makes a point that religion is a personal matter and should not be mixed with politics or applied in society at large.<sup>45</sup> In her views, Islam *per se* is not “fundamentalist”, rather it is the bigots and fanatics –in any religion<sup>46</sup>- that abuse the power of Islam to legitimise their policies. This point is confirmed by Llewellyn and Trzebiatowska in that “religion in itself is not a force that can liberate, or dominate at a whim but like any other social phenomenon, is dependent on the relations of power in a particular time and place” (2013, p. 253). Here, Satrapi’s purpose, once more, becomes entwined with her identity. Essentially, she has two main purposes. First is separating the identity of the “nation from that of the government and religion from the extremists” (McIntosh, 2013, p. 5). Her second purpose is even more nuanced. As mentioned earlier, Satrapi tries to define “the profound heterogeneity of peoples” in Iran (Moghissi, 1999, p. 5). Not everyone who is living under the Islamic laws shares the same ideology and culture. This becomes clear in the case of veiling in Iran. The *hejab* can be both interpreted as an empowering tool, sign of resistance or political

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<sup>44</sup> Beside what has discussed so far regarding Satrapi’s religious orientation, it is interesting to know that she is not a religious person. She declared this in one of her interviews: “ten or fifteen years ago if you said you didn’t believe in God, no one paid any attention. Now it’s a political statement somehow to be atheist or agnostic. When people ask me what is my religion, I say I don’t have any. And some people are shocked. They don’t understand. I say I don’t need it. I respect humanity. That’s my religion” (Satrapi as cited in Mind Candy, 2013).

<sup>45</sup> In an interview with Hattenstone (2008) in *The Guardian*, she said: “religion is a very personal affair. It’s between someone and what he considers the god, or the supreme spirit or whatever, and it’s very good while it remains personal. The second it becomes public, it’s no good. And that’s why I don’t make it public either” (Satrapi in Hattenstone, 2008).

<sup>46</sup> Satrapi is “using her time within Europe to draw nuanced insights into the culture that so readily stereotypes her own heritage by drawing parallels between East and West. She notes, after an encounter with a particularly draconian Nun, that every religion fosters ‘the same extremists’ (Satrapi, 2008, p.180), whilst proceeding to compare the similarities between European fascism and Iran’s fundamentalism (Satrapi, 2008, p. 229)” (McIntosh, 2013, p. 5).

independence in confrontation with “Western” hegemony.<sup>47</sup> While “under the rule of fundamentalists in the Middle East and North Africa, women who are persecuted, jailed and whipped for their non-compliance with the *hejab*, find the dress code anything but empowering” (Moghissi, 1999, p. 5). Central to Satrapi’s argument is focusing on the heterogeneity of the Muslim population as the mostly neglected area of orientalist discussions. This is confirmed by Moghissi in *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism*.

Talking out of context about ‘Muslim’ cultural practices also obscures the profound heterogeneity of peoples from Muslim societies within or without the Middle East. People who live under Islamic laws are not bound together by a metaculture, even less by Islamic politics. Many are discriminated against and many more are severely punished for that reason alone. Which is to say ‘difference’ is not a term to use only for drawing attention to dissimilarities between ‘Muslim’ and ‘Western’ ways and views. It is also a useful term to note the contrast among the ways and views of people from ‘Muslim’ societies. (Moghissi, 1999, p. 5).

In fact, she is trying “to subvert the Western gaze upon her showing to the Western reader a more complex perspective of herself and Iran in opposition to the homogeneous other constructed by the West about the Middle East” (Madella, 2012, p. 1). Interestingly, Satrapi’s concern in juxtaposing the stereotypical image of Iran in “West” can be seen in her listening to her favoured music such as the Bee Gees and Pink Floyd (Satrapi, 2003, p. 37) or wearing “Western” clothes such as a denim jacket and Nikes or the encapsulation of her parent’s Marxist ideology (Satrapi, 2003, p. 130). In *Persepolis*, Satrapi reminds her readers that “the film’s about being true to yourself, it’s about humanism, and it’s a story about a life, a film that pleads for love and for peace. After seeing this film you don’t want to make war - or revolution either” (Mohammadi, 2007). Giving voice to both orientalist accusations of *Persepolis* and the actual Occidentalism in Satrapi’s *intentio auctoris* will diversify the discussion.

### **Feminism**

Satrapi’s argument in favour of women’s emancipation and against the *hejab* has contributed to present her as a feminist. Satrapi notes how French feminist circles have looked at her as one of their own, i.e. “a perpetrator of an ideology that dictates women as superior to men” (Satrapi in Tully, 2004). Chute, for instance, believes that: “its [*Persepolis*] content is keenly feminist,” and states that she “will argue that we may understand the text as modelling

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<sup>47</sup> The concept of “hegemony” is mutated in contemporary academia from the writings of Antonio Gramsci. This is intended as a form of dominance, a natural process in which the power bloc and the subalterns are in a constant state of negotiation, compromise and change. Cultural hegemony, according to Gramsci, is a condition where rules are imposed by a class and thus involve coercion as well as consent. This process is informed by common sense (incoherent and fragmented truths) and good sense (the philosophy of praxis, i.e. socialism) (Gramsci, in Crehan, 2012).

a feminist methodology in its form” (Chute, 2008, p. 94). Satrapi, however, does not aim to be an advocate of feminism.

These sick feminists, they believe that since they have shown their legs and their breasts, they are very free. The idea that they look down at these women just because they’re putting a veil on their head, it is just too much, and I didn’t want to participate in that at all. It would make me feel dirty, really (Satrapi in Shaikh, *Asia Society*, n.d.).

Once again, Satrapi’s public declarations show she is not interested in ‘feminism’:

“ABC News: People see a compelling story of women in struggle in your work, but you object to being called a feminist? Satrapi: I am absolutely not a feminist, I am against stupidity, and if it comes from males or females it doesn’t change anything. If it means that women and men, they are equal, then OK, certainly I am a feminist. It happens that I am a woman, so it becomes a ‘woman coming of age story.’ I think if I was a man it wouldn’t change so much, they never call it a “man coming of age story.” It is a human coming of age story, let’s go for the humanity and humanism, it’s a much better thing than this ‘womanhood’ and ‘manhood’ and I don’t know ‘hermaphrodite-hood,’ and etc., etc.” (Satrapi in Ghadishah, 2008).

Satrapi criticises “Western” secular feminism that looks down on religion and “non-European” societies and cultures and does not want to be associated with it, but this does not make her ‘not’ one. Some considers her as a feminist, due to her discussions on women’s empowerment in society. However, she refuses to be called a feminist, and insists on her argument about humanity and gender equality. Satrapi, as argued, is simplifying and generalising feminism and looking at it from one particular angle that positions her against the “Western” and secular feminist tradition in general.

To analyse Satrapi’s voluntary rejection of feminism, it is necessary to review the history of writing about women’s concerns as understood in three different stages. Back in the nineteenth century, “European” feminist critique started with addressing the dominant centeredness of the male sex in society in general. The first women’s movement was an objection to the socio-political exclusion. According to Pam Alldred and Sarah Dennison, it was a “struggle for equality and integration” (as cited in Saadallah, 2004, p. 216). The second stage in the history of feminism, according to Gillis, Howie and Munford (2004), emerged in 1960s as a self-defined movement (p. 1). The sharpest criticism pointed at second wave was actually “the claim that white middle-class feminists did not speak for all women” (Zack, 2005, p. 1). It seems that Satrapi positions herself against this dominant attitude in the Second Wave feminism. This is in line with the views of some feminists who believe that “women of colour experience multiple oppressions, resulting in unique identities of race, gender, and class” (Zack, 2005, p. 2). Third Wave feminism,<sup>48</sup> based on Gillis et al.’s definition of the term,

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<sup>48</sup> Based on the history of feminism, Gillis et al. (2004) believe that “the third wave has been overly eager to define itself as something ‘different’ from previous feminisms” (p. 2). Using the term “third

questions the notions of unity and collectively (2004, p. 1). Feminism in its Third Wave, according to Saadallah, is the one that embraces diversity. “This allows for a feminism which is non-monolithic and a feminism which responds to the emerging necessities and real issues facing women today, rather than attempting to fit all women into the structures conceptualised by the Second wave” (Saadallah, 2004, p. 219). Based on this definition and considering the *intentio auctoris*, Third Wave feminism seems to be more in line with Satrapi’s concerns.

However, as Zack puts the idea, Third Wave also needs to be more inclusive and should not turn the biological difference into a barrier. In her opinion, Third wave feminism should be able to listen to and speak to all women with “a dimension of common selfhood” (Zack, 2005, p. 23). Women’s common identity should consider race, ethnicity and religion and avoid excluding them (Snyder-Hall, 2010, p. 259). This ideal framework, however, has not yet been fulfilled. Although Third wave feminism established itself upon differences in race, gender or sex, it “challenged the way difference has been incorporated into feminism, arguing that in the recognition of other women’s differences there is also a relic of the imperial dynamic of feminism’s hegemony” (Seedat, 2013, p. 28). According to Dawn Llewellyn and Marta Trzebiatowska (2013), as a legacy of previous feminisms, Third Wave feminism neglects “the multiple, intersecting and complex factors of identity and experience” (p. 251). Religion, as put by Llewellyn and Trzebiatowska, is still missing from the category of identity lists or probably (mis)assumed to be implicit in ‘race’, ‘ethnicity’ or ‘culture’ (2013, p. 251).

Yet ‘religion’ is a factor that intersects other identity categories, and like other categories can also be sub-divided. The religious and spiritual can be broken down according to tradition, denomination, or any number of variances which can add layers of complexity to how women define themselves. In overlooking religion, third wave feminism brackets out the complicated work religions do, in their many complex forms, in people’s lives. (Llewellyn and Trzebiatowska, 2013, p. 250)

Based on Seedat and Zack’s argument, Third Wave feminism would also not be able to accommodate Satrapi’s concerns, as it remains unable to distance itself from the pitfall of homogenizing implicit in Second Wave feminism due to its separation of the ‘secular’ from ‘religious’ (Llewellyn and Trzebiatowska, 2013, p. 251). *Intentio auctoris* clearly suggests that the idea of religion, race and borders ought to be avoided in feminist writings in order to engage with women rights and citizenship all around the world especially in the Middle East (Kandiyoti, 2001, p. 53). In summary, what mostly concerns Satrapi regarding feminism is

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wave” especially at an academic level, might “risk reducing its complexity and might impose imperatives driven by an external discourse we are, nevertheless, concerned by how this wave delimits itself from prior feminist theory and practice, thereby opening and closing debates within feminism” (p. 2). According to Spencer (2004), “evidently, the third wave is not going to give us our synthesis. There is some doubt as to whether it exists at all beyond a contentious label” (p. 11).

this notion of exclusive feminism<sup>49</sup> in that she considers the term feminism as mostly used in reference to “Western” women, and thus Iranian women have been excluded in this notion. This, as I will argue in the second chapter, might be the same reason for Satrapi’s “resistance to being co-opted into an uncritical feminist framework” (Seedat, 2013, p. 27). As mentioned above, her purpose was to erase the differences between Muslim struggles for equality from those of Western women. Satrapi’s neutral position and the purpose she defined for authoring her work, as mentioned, actually contested this binary discourse. As Madella claims: “instead of depicting the West as a saviour, symbol of freedom, she uses her supposedly autobiographical story to question the geographical dichotomy responsible for creating the marginalized other” (Madella, 2012, p. 2). According to Madella, what *Persepolis* tries to show is the “complexity and multiplicity of Iranian people for a reader who is not used to this perspective of this people” (p. 3). Being interested in her mum’s favourite book -*The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir- Satrapi takes the construction of women as *the other* to men and realizes her *otherness* in the “West”. Therefore, as Madella suggests, “it is possible to use the other in Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* as a parallel along with Said’s other in Orientalism” (2012, p. 8). Her disappointment with both the “Western” and Iranian culture can be related to her failure of fitting into these cultures. In this sense, her *Persepolis* becomes a way of representation that creates identity differently from those of the “Western” and “non-Western” feminists. Based on her claims regarding her distance from feminist circles in general (although she did not specify any special type of feminism), the second chapter of this thesis analyses Satrapi’s work in the framework of feminist studies with their defined disciplines and policies. Her main point, in my opinion, is that one should not look at sharp distinction between “European” and the Middle Eastern feminism or even talk about “Western” and “Eastern” feminism. Satrapi’s rejection of being a feminist could be related to her inclusive views towards all women. Patricia McFadden similarly argues, that attributing feminism to the “West” is as wrong as placing “Western” feminism against “Eastern”. The problem in discriminatory notions of feminism lies in ignoring the general concern of all feminists which is “responding to patriarchal exclusion” (2001, p. 61).

Satrapi’s work along with her intention and position as an Iranian dissident with her declared message of ‘humanity’ will be used, as suggested and emphasized by herself throughout her work and public declarations, to prove her dual position with reference to discussions of the compulsory *hejab* in Iran or the *hejab* ban in France. While living in Iran,

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<sup>49</sup> In Zack’s words, hegemonic feminism can be defined as “the U.S. group calling itself feminist and purporting to speak, write, and think for all women on earth was regarded by women who were not white, affluent, American, or northern European as representing only itself and its own interests” (2005, p. 6). Subsequently, a feminist theory should make sense to refer to all categories of women, i.e. colour and white, religious and secular, “First” or “Third-world” women.

the *hejab* itself has never been an issue for Satrapi. What she opposes is the imposition of the *hejab* by the revolutionary government i.e. applying Islamic legislations as interpreted by the officials at public level. As Satrapi believes, at the time when the *hejab* is discussed as a faith-related or doctrinal notion, compulsion has no place in such debates. According to her, everything that uses the language of force is wrong. As much as Satrapi is against imposing the *hejab* on women in Iran, she disagrees with laws banning it in France. In fact, what Satrapi argues, in terms of the *hejab*, is the notion of having ‘choice’ or freedom in choosing to wear or not to wear it.

Discussions concerning feminist issues in post-revolutionary Iranian society are as diverse as the categories of feminism. Contextualising Satrapi’s position within the diverse ethnicities and cultures in Iran would also clarify her *intentio auctoris* and thus make sense of her rejection of being a feminist. Any feminist movement in the context of the Islamic Republic could be generalised as Muslim feminism. However, the reality is more nuanced. Muslim feminism, according to Saadallah, is “a *tactical change* in response to the contemporary political and socio-economic realities in the majority of post-fundamentalist Muslim societies” (2004, p. 217). Muslim feminists “are dismantling the *status quo* of male-dominated Islamic interpretation and acculturation which serves to reinforce women’s subjugation” (Saadallah, 2004, p. 219). With reference to Islamic feminism, Karam argues that, while Muslim/Islamic feminism engages with international human rights, it is grounded inside the Islamic sources. Muslim feminists believe that “Islam is the religion of enlightenment and egalitarianism and unsavoury practices relegating women to second-class citizenship are not intrinsic to true Islamic values or to the Shari’a [Islamic law] and never were” (Schwartz as cited in Saadallah, 2004, p. 219). This should not be confused with the Islamist feminist discourse which is not “*progressive*” and is only a “reflection of neo-patriarchal attitudes” (Saadallah, 2004, p. 218). Islamist feminists do not allow an emancipatory presence for females to integrate with the international human rights.<sup>50</sup> In this

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<sup>50</sup> During the Arab Spring this has changed dramatically. Islamist feminists in Egypt mobilised women in rural areas in particular to gain more support. See *A Quiet Revolution* by Leila Ahmed (2011). According to Carrie Rosefsky Wicham (1990), the mainstream Islamist movement spread veiling and increased women’s involvement in Islamist movements. “Their goal, quite simply, as Wicham also notes, was to ‘indoctrinate their targets with a particular interpretation of Islam.’ Moreover, this interpretation of Islam was one that, as Wicham points out, ‘stood apart from and challenged the validity of mainstream forms of religious faith and practice.’ Islamist associations, Wicham shows, served their members in a wide variety of ways, providing them, for example, with valuable social support networks.” This support ranged from securing their jobs or obtaining visa for women to work abroad, “gain access to funds distributed by mosques, and even improve their marriage prospects” (Wicham as cited in Ahmed, 2011, p. 150).



regard, Satrapi's declared statement in terms of more feminist interpretations of the Qur'an<sup>51</sup> seems to be in line with Muslim feminist discourses rather than Islamist feminist.

Furthermore, apart from Islamic and Islamist feminism in Iran, secular feminists play an important role in discussions of feminism. They believe that Islam in general with its set of divine laws for women is debilitating to feminism. Azza Karam (1998) in her *Women, Islamism and the State: Contemporary Feminism in Egypt* defines secular feminism as grounded on human rights internationally and outside religion. The term 'Islamic feminism', according to one secular feminist, Susan Muaddi Darraj (2003), seems like an "oxymoron" i.e. Islam is incompatible with feminism. Haideh Moghissi in her *Feminism and Islamic fundamentalism* defines *shari'ah* as an entity which "distinguishes between the rights of human beings on the basis of sex (and religion), the *Shari'a* unapologetically discriminates against women and religious minorities" (1999, p. 142). In her words, "if the principles of the *Shari'a* are to be maintained, women cannot be treated any better. Women cannot enjoy equality before the law and in law. The *Shari'a* is not compatible with the principles of equality of human rights" (p. 142). Moghissi believes that it is impossible to believe in the notions of equality and Islam, because the nature of Islam is based on "the sexual hierarchy within the family and society" and the one who believes in the fundamentals of the Qur'an, "the Qur'anic laws and instructions on such an important question as equality are beyond human intervention" (1999, p. 142). Consequently, Satrapi's critical position towards the application of *shari'ah* in the context of the society and her advocacy of separation of religion from the state might categorise her as a secular feminist. However, based on Moghissi's argument, Satrapi's concerns regarding the *hejab* does not seem to focus on the *hejab* itself as an Islamic duty, rather, more significantly, she is objecting to the imposition of it by the revolutionary government. Classifying Satrapi as a secular feminist reads the *intentio auctoris* wrongly. In other words, her concern in this case could be read as articulating her rejection of Islam not Iranian politics. However, as illustrated at the beginning of this section, this is far from Satrapi's *intentio auctoris* and her opinions and position towards the *hejab*.

### **Political theory**

Since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has faced many challenges in terms of human rights and democracy. Many human rights activists and feminists declared that the Islamic Republic

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<sup>51</sup> In an interview with *The Guardian* (2003), Satrapi clarifies her position, and raises the rather feminist issue of interpretation (*tafsir*) of the Qur'an. The author of *Persepolis* insists on the need to move away from interpretations of the Qur'an provided by male *mollahs* only. According to Satrapi, the rules established by such male authorities are oppressive by nature for women. "Oh yes. You see, the basic problem of a country like mine, apart from the regime, apart from the government, is the patriarchal culture that is leading my country ... When it touches anything it gives its own interpretation, and the interpretation goes towards politics, towards religion, towards everything. So that is the situation" (Satrapi in Tully, 2004).

is the source of oppression and violates the basic human rights. Women in Iran as well as many other Islamic societies, as argued by many feminists, suffer from discriminatory treatments and are subjected to inequality. Therefore, any feminist concerns in Iran have been initiated as the result of the state's abuse of power against women. Discourses that question women's choice and individualism have contributed to the formation of feminist movements in Iran. Intellectuals and upper middle-class women distance themselves from Islam, and their critical position towards the Islamic Republic became a constant recurring theme in many works following the revolution. In Talattof's words, the significant increase in women's issues especially in post-revolutionary literature is due to the state's structuring policies. He states, "ironically, the Islamization of the country caused the emergence of unprecedented literary works by women" (Talattof, 2000, p. 140). According to Talattof, the compulsory dress code along with other socio-political changes provided the context for intellectual women<sup>52</sup> in opposition to "speak out on all aspects of gender issues, beginning with organized resistance to mandatory veiling, while simultaneously breaking away from the left, which remained indifferent to their cause" (2000, p. 172). Since then, many secular or religious oriented activists worked within and beyond the borders of the Islamic state to end the discrimination against women, but have mostly been reprimanded. Escaping from the communal society of Iran to individualistic, liberated and free society of the "West" has actually "accumulated the necessary symbolic capital [for members of elite] to become iconic native converts to Western liberalism" (Nash, 2012, p. 64). In the case of Satrapi and other post-revolutionary authors, they mostly denounced gender policies, in particular the mandatory veiling, and produced a thorough critique and sometimes provocative assaults against the Islamic Republic. The separation of *shari'ah* from politics would be their final solution to many of the women's problems. Many feminists in Iran such as Haideh Moghissi (1999) argue that one's personal belief in Islam should not extend into the political or legal realms i.e. *shari'ah*. While she strongly believes in the separation of religion and the state, Moghissi understands a just and democratic society without a "*Shari'a* hat (*Kolah-e Sharii*)" (p. 1).<sup>53</sup> Implementing the Islamization policies in the context of the society ought to be challenged to restrict the fundamentalist practices of religion and therefore to improve the human rights situation. In this regard, Satrapi shares the same ideology with Moghissi.

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<sup>52</sup> For other women belonging to lower social classes, the complete break from Islam was not the case. "They may not wish to relinquish its spiritual and moral dimensions, or vacate it when it requires defending as part of their identity. But they reject its 'instrumentalization' [...] to serve patriarchal and political interests" (Nash, 2012, p. 64).

<sup>53</sup> "*Shari'a* hat (*kolah-e Sharii*) is an expression used to refer to the manipulation of Islamic rules for legitimizing an illegitimate action" (Moghissi, 1999, p. 11).

Actually, discussion of human rights in Islamic societies is accentuated when it comes to women's rights under fundamentalist regimes. In Iran, feminism seems to have emerged as "the opposite of fundamentalism", and since "fundamentalists are supposed to hate democracy, it follows that empowering women will further the cause of feminism, which in turn will help eliminate Islamic fundamentalism" (Mahmood, 2011, p. 91).<sup>54</sup> Islamic ideologies are always at the risk of being abused by politicians who attempt to impose a vision of Islam at state level to justify their autocratic ambitions. Obviously, there are many situations in which religion is specifically misused to oppress others. "The extremist religious politics of groups such as al-Qaeda and the Taliban are examples of misapprehending and abusing religion in service of particular political goals" (Zine, 2004, p. 184). According to Barlow (2008), Islam *per se* is not a problem in discussions of human rights. Rather, the problem lies with the implementation of Islamism by those in power. "Whereas the term 'Islam' refers to one's personal belief system, the term 'Islamism' pertains to the politicization of that belief. Although these terms are interrelated, they are nevertheless analytically distinct" (Moghadam, 2001, p. 43).<sup>55</sup> When Islam is used as a support to a regime, the issues of democracy and human rights especially women's issues appear to be contradictory and not congenial with the Islamic doctrine. In such context, the rules are the ones purported by "*ayatollahs* and *mollas*" whose interpretation of religious texts is "fixed and authoritarian" which "coheres around the masculine world of the mosque" and privilege of maleness (Ahmed as cited in Nash, 2012, p. 53). According to Moghissi, "Qur'anic injunction and *Shari'a* rulings, as interpreted by the local *ulema* (jurists), continue to define women's legal status and provide a basis for gendered social and cultural practices" (Moghissi, 1999, p. 7). Therefore, there is no doubt that the contemporary legal practices and Islamic rules are the translation of *shari'ah* rulings under rigid 'Islamic fundamentalism'.

Moghissi believes that respecting the cultural differences and cultural authenticity should not hinder challenging the crimes, Islamic fundamentalists commit in the name of religion. In order to present a balanced discussion, the orientalist and the Islamophobic imagery of Islam in the world today should be debated along with the human rights violations and its devastating impact on women under the Islamic forces. "This means not participating in the destructive defensiveness which has shaped anti-colonial imagination in Islamic

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<sup>54</sup> According to Shahrzad Mojab (2001), "the experience of the Islamic Republic has shown, as a matter of fact, that Islamic theocracy reinforces the traditional patriarchal system. Thus, far from being an alternative to secular, radical, and socialist feminisms [it]... justifies unequal gender relations" (p. 131).

<sup>55</sup> In the process of giving validity to religious democracy and human rights, *velayat-e faqih* as the unique edge of applying Islam at state level in Iran should not be representing the whole Islam and should not be judged as the single interpretation of Islam. It should be mentioned here that Ayatollah Khomeini's *velayat-e faqih* is only ONE of the many understandings of the role of Islam in a modern nation-state. There are many other voices (such as Kadivar, or clerics like Shariatmadari, Montazeri or even Sistani) who do not consider a conflict between Islam and democracy.

societies- to refuse self-glorification and self-pity” (Moghissi, 1999, p. 4). Satrapi has also tried to give voice to such concerns by elaborating on the undemocratic nature of the Iranian policies through her objection to gender policies. Her agenda seems to be more anti-fundamentalist rather than feminist. In one of her interviews, she mentioned: “we knew we were living under a dictatorship (in Iran) so we never believed in what they said. We knew that our leaders were dictators” (Satrapi in Dave, 2006). Satrapi’s democracy is entwined closely with human rights especially women’s rights. This is similar to Shirin Ebadi’s case who asserts, in one of her talks, that it is true that a fair and free election is the base of a democratic government, however, “the elected government is still obliged to observe a framework for democracy. That framework is comprised of human rights laws and regulations” (2009, p. 17). She strongly believes that human rights is a universal value and has nothing to do with the religion, ethnicity or ideology. Based on this link between human rights and democracy, Ebadi thinks that “it is quite obvious that democracy is incomplete in Iran” (2009, p. 19) in terms of women’s rights and freedom of speech. Ebadi’s point is shared by other thinkers. Jack Donnelly believes that “there is an international legal and political consensus on the list of rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Human Rights Covenants” (2007, p. 24). He states that the contextual differences and various interpretations of human rights do not threaten this universality. This, however, is controversial. As Elena Namli (2014) argues in her *Human Rights as Ethics, Politics and Law*, a legitimate universal claim would always leave a space for cultural and national diversity; the variations of region or country do require un-identical practices in terms of human rights (p. 36). This universal and contextual consensus can be the base of disagreement between the Islamic Republic or the foundation of *velayat-e faqih* and Satrapi or the critics<sup>56</sup> of Ayatollah Khomeini’s political system. In Donnelly’s hypothesis, individualism is an important feature of any meaningful discourse on human rights. His position is rather commonly shared by many “Western” practitioners among them Satrapi or other memoirists. However, as Namli reminds us, monopolisation of individualism which is peculiar to “Western” ideology, is self-contradictory in discussions of human rights. Religion, nationality and region are all equally important factors in discourses on human rights. Ayatollah Khomeini’s interpretation of individual liberty as subordinate to collective safeness seems to be in line with Namli’s ideology. According to his political theology, one’s individual concerns are subordinate to the communal good. Living in a community of believers demands that individuals act within the

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<sup>56</sup> According to Kadivar six areas of conflict have been discovered between Khomeini’s system and the international universal concept of human rights. “(1) inequality between Muslims and non-Muslims, (2) inequality between men and women, (3) inequality between slaves and free human beings, (4) inequality between commoners and jurists in public affairs, (5) freedom of conscience and religion versus punishments for apostasy, and (6) extra-judicial punishments, violent punishments, and torture” (Kadivar, 2009).

limits of Islamic laws. The Islamic orders must be preserved and pursued by each and every individual. In Islam, the focal point is God as the lawgiver, and the duties of individuals are defined based on *shari'ah* rules. In Ayatollah Khomeini's system, human rights are defined by the principles of *shari'ah*.

In conclusion, Satrapi's advocated individualism which is in contradiction with the communal and public identity in the Islamic Republic is the cause of her critical position towards Iranian policies. She believes in a democratic system, the human rights ought to be respected and her definition of human rights is one based on "Western" individualism. Consequently, the Islamic Republic violated her rights as her individualism had been restricted. Just like Donnelly and Ebadi, Satrapi believes in the human rights as a universal value not contextual one. However, this as I will show in the first chapter is not in line with Satrapi's *intentio auctoris* which is rooted in her inclusive orientations towards humanity in general and respecting differences between nations and cultures. She objected to the "Western" feminist circles because of the exclusive nature of their ideology and the alienation of Iranian women. By supporting the individuality in human rights discussions, Satrapi, in fact, ignores the cultural, religious and national contexts in which human rights are defined and meaningful. This can be said to be the main source of her disagreement with the Islamic Republic's policies.

### **History**

Historical accounts can be very different depending upon the purpose for which they had been written down or the bodies who produced them. According to Rupke (2011), "familial or ethnic groups, social movements or religious organizations tell different stories and different histories, for varying purposes" (p. 287). Therefore, not all historical narratives are the same. My argument is that, if Satrapi's autobiographical account ought to be used as a learning tool in academic environments to learn about Iranian history and culture, then one must acknowledge that her historical account is very subjective, and according to her public declarations, has been written from her personal and individual point of view. This means that *Persepolis* could be an account of Iranian history; however, it is very unlikely to represent the modern history of Iran impartially through an autobiographical account. The controversy over divergent receptions of *Persepolis*, consequently, has its roots in considering Satrapi's work as Iranian *history* rather than an Iranian *story*. Despite unavoidable discrepancies in the historical accounts, what is important is that this process sheds light on divergent receptions of *Persepolis* and is a step forward in analysing the *intentio lectoris*.

At some points, to use Michel Foucault's notion of knowledge and power, some discourses attain priority over others and shape the explicit type of history (2005, p. 14). This

is confirmed by Sandra Harding that “knowledge is always socially situated. Thus, to the extent that an oppressed group’s situation is different from that of the dominant group, its dominated situation enables the production of distinctive kinds of knowledge” (2004, p. 7). The dominant, explicit and accessible history claims to have valid sources as evidence, however, this evidence has been chosen selectively (Rupke, 2011, p. 287). To study the history of Shi’a Islam or the history of the Islamic Republic, the base of which is derived from Shi’ism,<sup>57</sup> it is crucial to adopt various sources as Shi’ism in general and the Islamic Revolution in particular have mostly been essentialized. Some current accounts, i.e. unbalanced or biased representations of Iran and Islam, has led to an incomplete understandings of the Islamic political agenda underway in the country immediately before, during and after the revolution. This account of the history and background of the revolution and Shi’a culture has resulted in a totally different view in the minds of the general public, especially those who have not been living in Iran and are more likely to perpetuate anti-Iranian and anti-Islamic feelings. According to Axworthy, “Iranian concerns, values, problems, actions and reactions are wholly explicable and rational when seen in their own proper context, in the round; quite open to sympathy, and even familiar” (2013, p. xxii). In order to conceive the reasons and causes that led to the revolution in Iran, many have tried to consider this phenomenon through the lens of sociology, Marxism, or other political perspectives.<sup>58</sup> The results of such analyses have been published worldwide, and have mostly focused on one specific aspect of the revolution. The formation factors and socio-political variables have been interpreted differently. In order to present a more balanced and nuanced discussion, I offer a brief account of the revolution’s history from the viewpoint of academic scholars,<sup>59</sup> *olama*,

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<sup>57</sup> Shi’a rules and regulations are derived from the Qur’an, *ahadith* (narratives of the Prophet and the twelve Imams) and *Sunnah* (Ar. *Sunnah*; the lifestyle, teaching and practices of the Prophet). These sources design a holistic way of life for every Shi’a Muslim. The community ethos set by Shi’a Islam in Iran is meant to establish a public social order that is beneficial to everyone. Therefore, the commitment of the government to Shi’a Islam is not just to legitimise the power and authority of ruling but to keep this social order in place and to help deal with social problems in a just way. “The view of the Shi’ah concerning government and the nature of the persons who should assume rule was clear from the time following the death of the Prophet (s) down to the beginning of the Occultation” (Khomeini, 1970, p. 33). “The government is necessary and that the function of government that existed from the beginning of Islam down to the time of the Twelfth Imam (‘a) is still enjoined upon us by God after the Occultation even though he has appointed no particular individuals to function” (Khomeini, 1970, p. 33). “The constitutional law of the Islamic Republic of Iran (*qanun-i asasi-yi jumhuri-yi Islami-yi Iran*) translated Khumayni’s concept of a purely Islamic government (*Hokumat-i islami*) into reality” (Halm, 2004, p. 120). See also *Shi’ism and Constitutionalism in Iran* by Ha’iri (1977).

<sup>58</sup> There is no need to say that most of these researches have been conducted by foreign writers or non-experts on Iran. Such researches have mostly been based on second-hand resources due to the writers’ positions as outsiders. Lack of linguistic awareness, orientalist accounts, purposeful elisions, distorted interpretations and the writers’ distance from the socio-political atmosphere of the revolution and the participating masses have led to the illustration of a fraudulent picture which is totally contradictory to this phenomenon and its bases.

<sup>59</sup> The Islamic scholars that have been used in this research are meant to reflect the insider’s point of view on Shi’a Islam, such as *mojtahedin* and *foqaha*.

Iranian historians and professionals who are mostly considered as insiders. In my opinion, it is a matter of absolute necessity that audiences are subject to multi-faceted knowledge and education to avoid deleterious perceptions in general. As it is beyond the scope of this chapter to go through the Iran's political relations with the "West", a few historical events and reasons which made Iran newsworthy and the centre of attention for the "West" will be mentioned in the next following chapter.

Moreover, to gain a sound understanding of human rights and feminist issues in the Middle East especially in Iran, readings of politics, and in particular the historical and social context should be included. Ziba Mir-Hosseini argues: "the *Shari'a* can be understood and studied only in its complex double image, as both expressing and moulding social practice; it can neither be divorced from the social context in which it operates nor understood merely by textual analysis" (1993, p. 200). Also, Deniz Kandiyoti in her *Women, Islam and the State* emphasises on political factors along with the socio-economic process. "The subordination of Muslim women can neither be read off solely from Islamic ideology and practice, nor be entirely derived from global processes of socio-economic transformation, nor for that matter from the universalistic premises of feminist theory" (1991, p. 2). Rather, Kandiyoti believes the state plays the most significant role in highlighting gender inequalities. In an apolitical context, Kandiyoti argues, the specificity of Islam in local culture, the historical complexities, kinship and economy system could hardly be explored. In the case of Iran, pre-revolution history as well as post-revolutionary trajectories of the Islamic Republic and their new deployment of Islam in line with nationalism, and formation of oppositional movements are central in understanding and studying the human rights and women's rights.

The history of foreign powers' intervention had a major influence on feminist issues in post-revolutionary era, e.g. "Westernization" policies of Reza Shah under the influence of Atatürk. The post-revolutionary vision is that any change in women's condition is a concession to the "Western" imperialist and hegemonic agenda. In Moghissi's words, "in the context of demonization of Islam and Muslims which are mostly found in the West it is essential to defend the rights of Muslim communities to cultural autonomy and unhindered religious practices" (Moghissi, 1999, p. 4). As a result, the nationalism of Iran and defence and embrace of Islamic culture as a symbol of identity led to views that any changes were identified as plots against Islam and designed by enemies (Rhouni, 2010, p. 50). This conservative approach which was applied by post-revolutionary government retained Islam as the basis of political legitimacy. As a reaction to the "Western" hegemonic discourses, the citizens' rights, in

particular women, were kept within Islamic national identity.<sup>60</sup> Any discussions of reform or modernity are identified (by current revolutionary government) as a “Western” attack. Therefore, the reaffirmation of the Islamic customs especially with respect to women became the centre of attention for politicians in Iran. A call to return to the authentic Islamic culture was an end which used women as its symbol. In conclusion, the separation of religion and politics, advocated by Satrapi and other memoirists, would be considered as imperialist or orientalist or “Western”-inspired plans against the nationalism or Islamism of the country.

Thirty five years after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, and despite both the internal and external threats to overthrow the Islamic Republic, the Iranian state based on the political thought of *velayat-e faqih* has survived and proved to be a stable state in the region.<sup>61</sup> What is noteworthy here is that the Iranian system has been in place, despite observers anticipating its downfall within a few years especially with oppositions from “Western” powers. Ayatollah Khomeini’s understanding of *velayat-e faqih* is quite radical and innovative and has been rejected by a number of *maraje*<sup>62</sup> in the Shi’i world (which will be discussed in details in the first chapter) – but it has a certain appeal among many religious and revolutionary Iranians, because they feel it is more authentic to Iranian culture than “Western” ideologies. In short, the modern history of Iran shows that the political space has never lacked the presence of *olama* as representatives of religion. The integration of religion and state in Iran has its roots in the domination of foreign powers. The role of *olama* was mostly to stand against the rulers’ policies, e.g. “Westernization” of Iran. The historical background will pave the way to clarify the accusation of *Islam setizi* against *Persepolis* and similar works in post-revolutionary Iran. This is also beneficial in analysing Satrapi’s dissatisfaction with the current policies of the

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<sup>60</sup> Feminist studies out of the political context mark the significance of orientalist approaches in Middle Eastern women’s studies. Zeenath Kausar believes that “feminism cannot or has not developed over time to manifest in a host of both secular and religious trajectories embraced by colonized, colonizing, and anticolonial communities, Muslim and non-Muslim actors alike” (Seedat, 2013, p. 31). As Fatima Seedat argues, “for Kausar, feminism is inherently materialistic and therefore irredeemably problematic for Islam. Quite close to the point of view of Kausar, Dipesh Chakrabarty believes “feminism has strong associations with political modernity, is similarly a construct associated with European modernity, and the genealogy of feminism is intimately associated with the ‘intellectual and theological traditions of Europe’” (as cited in Seedat, 2013, p. 30). Seedat also thinks “third-wave feminism frequently returns instead to posit white liberal ways of being woman as universal ways of being woman” (2013, p. 28). She believes in the gap between “European” and the Middle Eastern feminism and attributes the total feminist discourses to the hypothesis of distinctive superiority of “Western” culture over the “East”.

<sup>61</sup> The Gulf monarchies and Jordan have also been stable.

<sup>62</sup> *Maraje*’ is the plural form of *marja*’. *Mojtahedin* is the plural form of *mojtahed*. *Mojtahed* or *marja-e-taqlid* is the only source of guidance for Shi’as who are not qualified in religious studies. “*Mujtahid*: an authority on divine law who practices *ijtihad*, that is, “the search for a correct opinion...in the deducing of the specific provisions of the law from its principles and ordinances” (Muhammad Sanglaji, *Qazā dar Islam* [Tehran, 1338 Sh. /1959], p.14)” (Khomeini, 1970, p. 8).



Islamic Republic regarding the *hejab* or the human rights, as well as her disillusionment with the practice of democracy in Iran.

### **Representation of Islam<sup>63</sup> and Iran in media<sup>64</sup>**

According to Stuart Hall, representation is “the act of describing or depicting people, objects and events—as the production of meaning through language and other signifying practices” (1997, p. 17). Hall believes that, prior to the representation of something from an object to a notion or concept, that specific entity does not have any fixed meaning. Putting this differently, “there is no meaningful ‘reality’ beyond the processes of representation because representation itself constitutes meaning” (Hall, 1997, p. 17). To represent means to render concepts shared by a social group or culture as true or typical. With reference to the history of foreign powers’ interference in the Orient and the unequal relationship between the Orient and the “West”, Islam has mostly been perceived as belonging to the Orient and thus “has been to be looked at [...] as if it were one monolithic thing, with a very special hostility and fear” (Said, 1997, p. 4). It goes without saying that “Islam and activities of certain Muslims are very newsworthy subjects” (Poole and Richardson, 2006, p. 1). Experts and non-experts have pontificated in news and TV shows about Islam with stereotypical generalisations and clichés (Poole and Richardson, 2006, p. 116). Unfortunately, what is usually discussed in the media about Islam, is in most cases at the time of political crisis. It is in such crisis that Islam is easily linked to extremism. According to Poole and Richardson, in very few cases, there might be news other than War on Terror regarding Islam (2006, p. 1). The dominant deliberate associations between Islam and fundamentalism, in Said’s words, has come to ensure that fundamentalism is a part of Islam and literally the same thing. To speak of Islam in “Western” countries, Said says, can mean “a lot of unpleasant things” ranging from backwardness, violence, primitiveness and atavism (p. 10). Said believes that it is very rare to see a neutral cultural or scientific article on Islam in the news: “only when there is a bomb in Saudi Arabia or the threat of violence against the United States in Iran has ‘Islam’ seemed worthy of general

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<sup>63</sup> The definition of the Islamic world, according to Said, is more a part of the postcolonial world: “Islam belongs neither to Europe nor, like Japan, to the advanced industrial group of nations. It has been regarded as falling within the purview of ‘development perspective’, which is another mode of saying that Islamic societies were considered for at least three decades to be in need of ‘modernisation’” (Said, 1997, p. iii). In short, Said’s definition of Islam is the “West’s” menace. The Islamic nation is known as “they” and is imagined to stand against the “West”: “France, Britain, and in particular the United States” (p. xlix). To his belief, other great civilizations of the Orient such as India and China do not seem to be a factor of apprehension like Islam. “Only Islam seemed never to have submitted completely to the West” (Said, 1997, p. 5). As Said suggested - and in order to be clear with the terms like “Islam and the West” - it is important to mention here that “labels purporting to name very large and complex realities are notoriously vague and at the same time unavoidable” (1997, p. 7).

<sup>64</sup> All those cultural apparatus that are delivering the message of Islam to Americans and Europeans, Said believes, includes the media, namely the newspapers and magazines, internet, TV and radios.

comment” (1997, p. 16). Therefore, Islam has become the core argument in policy making circles as well as the media (Said, 1997, p. xx). This type of knowledge does not need to be documented or properly proved. Based on Michel Foucault’s notion of knowledge and power discussed above, the news media and reporting are powerful enough to “produce the objects of our knowledge, and govern the way these topics and objects of our knowledge are discussed” (Fayyaz & Shirazi, 2013, p. 54). As long as Islam is the subject, the negative biases and communicable set of feelings are easily accepted (Said, 1997, p. 47).<sup>65</sup>

As mentioned in the history of Iran’s relation with the “West”, among all Muslim countries - Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Pakistan etc. in the world - Iran continues to be the centre of attention for the “West” (according to Said’s definition of “East” and “West”), especially for the United States. The textual analysis of the news and articles on Iran and Iranians in “Western” news sources shows that “Western” media representations have been mostly negative, and filled with stereotypes that “are not simply efforts aimed at describing the real Iran, but rather form the basis of what Said refers to as a powerful ‘community of interpretation’ that often reflects and reproduces certain xenophobic stereotypes of non-Western foreign subjects” (Fayyaz & Shirazi, 2013, p. 53). That is to say, the dominant representations focus on the old orientalist discourses which stems from the Islamic culture and Iran’s commitment to Islamic rules. Indeed, Iran’s unique Shi’a government, the hostage crisis of 1979 and its nuclear program have been all contributed to be the focus of the rest of the world (Eid and Dakroury, 2010, p. 15). Edward Said (1997) noted this in commenting a *Los Angeles Times* report back in 1991 where Robin Wright, an expert on Islam and a senior advisor of the Bush administration, observed that: “we have to be smarter in dealing with Islam than in dealing with communism 30 or 40 years ago” (Robin in Said, p. 7). However, “the danger of simplifying a ‘myriad of countries’ was noted, but the only picture in the five column piece was of Ayatollah Khomeini (the founder of the Islamic Revolution in Iran). He and Iran, embodied all that was objectionable about Islam, from terrorism and anti-Westernism” (p. 7).<sup>66</sup> In the last thirty five years since the Islamic Revolution, the ontological basis of media representations are still remarkably durable.

A “Western” scholar, Axworthy (2013) believes that there are other reasons to study and comment on Iran. “As long as the linear development of [the] Middle East to the Western

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<sup>65</sup> This can be true about “West” to some degree. It is very unlikely that all those who talk about Islam and the “West” have a solid grip on all dimensions of Islamic culture or “Western” culture. Obviously, such people are very few “but this does not prevent people from confidently characterizing ‘Islam’ and ‘the West’ or from believing they know exactly what it is they are talking about” (Said, 1997, p. 10). Orientalists and Occidentalists are of this group.

<sup>66</sup> See also: “The absence of newspaper regulation compared to broadcast news media allows newspapers to print the often extreme views of columnists and letter writers” (Poole and Richardson, 2006, p. 2).

model is no longer the only option, Iran's history and culture cannot be avoided" (p. xix). While he thinks that Iranian Shi'ism should not be labelled as "fundamentalism", he expresses: "in the West, we think we know about Iran, but what we think we know is often misleading or simply false" (p. xx). He adds that: "we think of images of demonstrations and chanting crowds and assume (encouraged by our news media) that Iranian Shi'ism is a dangerous, uncontrollable, fanatical force" (p. xxi). The "anti-Western" and anti-imperialist politics of Iran that have led to the country's economic and cultural self-sufficiency - despite the crippling imposed sanctions – Axworthy believes, is another key point which has made Iran newsworthy. The reactionary counter-response of Iranian policies is based on a particular interpretation of Islamic doctrine (Khomeini's *velayat-e faqih*), and the governments' policies are determined by strategic and geopolitical considerations in particular when it comes to dealing with the "West". During the hostage crisis, which happened on 4th November 1979, the peak time when Iran was in the news, the consensus on this issue was to focus on the hostage event itself.<sup>67</sup> It was a reality that was transferred all over the world without further explanation of the political circumstances, the situation that lead to such an event, the history of the foreign interferences, the international threats or the reasons for the revolution. All were ignored at the price of the term "hostage".<sup>68</sup> Since that event, Iran has been in the headlines of American news. As Said described, there has been no specific change in the world's (not just Americans') view of Muslims for the last three or four decades, despite political changes. This mood of outrage has been conveyed through American media to other parts of the world. According to Van Dijk, "the media are not neutral, common-sense[d], or rational mediator of social events, but essentially help reproduce preformulated ideologies" (1988, p.11). Central to my argument in the final part of the first chapter, is giving importance to the relationship between media and politics. It remains true that an independent press and a courageous journalist can pursue 'truth'. In order to avoid essentialising the media, an example of *The*

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<sup>67</sup> "For several months ABC scheduled a daily late-evening special, *America Held Hostage*, and PBS' Mac Neil/Lehre Report ran an unprecedented number of shows on the crisis. For months Walter Cronkite would add to his "that's the way it is" a reminder of how many days the hostages had been in captivity" (Said, 1997, p. 82).

<sup>68</sup> As mentioned earlier, the 'wicked' label of 'hostage' was enough to prompt the world to ignore more than a century of American political and economic interference in Iran. In "the background of the so called capitulations [...] various powers beginning with England were given extraterritorial economic, diplomatic, and juridical privileges in Iran" (Said, 1997, p. 102). Quite subtly, Said refers to a quotation from Ayatollah Khomeini about the political and diplomatic rights that were given to the English and Americans by the Shah. This has never been mentioned in the media: "if the Shah would run over an American dog, he would be called to account, but if an American cook should run over the Shah ... no one has any claim against him" (p. 102).

*Guardian* campaign to uncover media intrusion, as well as the war documentary by John Pilger<sup>69</sup> will be discussed.

Apart from media, Iran has been increasingly discussed by politicians, historians, sociologists, academics, and so forth. Studies of the history and culture of revolutionary Iran continue to be conducted on a number of fronts and in different languages. These, however, are not easily accessible to everybody. More often such works target scholarly – or highly specialised – audiences. Similarly, like media dispatches, the literature produced by Iranian diasporas/exiles after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, mostly in the form of memoirs, are popular readings amongst diverse audiences. Quite often, the accounts of post-revolutionary authors can be very similar to those of the media representations. This is nothing new when one considers their critical position towards the Islamic Republic's governmental structure and policies. However, with regards to Satrapi's *intentio auctoris*, this seems to be paradoxical. Detailed analysis of Satrapi's social background with secular orientations in Iran before the Islamic Revolution, one would not expect her to support the Islamic rituals and ideologies being practiced and applied at public level by the revolutionary government.

#### **Autobiography: fact or fiction?**

Following the study of divergent receptions of *Persepolis*, the second level of inquiry is its analysis as a form of autobiography. "Satrapi's *Persepolis* is an unconventional autobiography" (McIntosh, 2013, p. 1). Schroeder believes that *Persepolis* is semi-fictionalised (2010, p. 6). "Indeed, Satrapi has said that everything she presents in her memoirs is true, but that the stories are not a moment-by-moment documentary of the events in her life. 'You always have to arrange things to tell a story' Satrapi has said of her writing and illustrations" (Schroeder, 2010, p. 6). In fact, Satrapi as an autobiographer tried "to invent herself despite the weight of her family history, and autobiographical singularity emerges in negotiation with this legacy" (Miller, 2007, p. 543).

It is argued that an autobiography is inevitably a personal and selective account, and cannot be taken as a complete and unbiased representation of a larger picture, especially one involving events as complex as the Islamic Revolution and gender issues in Iran. As Keshavarz informs us, autobiographies are an incomplete illustration of another culture:

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<sup>69</sup> John Pilger (b. 1973) is an Australian born journalist. His articles appear worldwide in famous newspapers such as *The Guardian*, *Los Angeles Times* and *The New York Times*. He was the "chief foreign correspondent and reported from all over the world, covering numerous wars, notably Vietnam. Still in his twenties, he became the youngest journalist to receive Britain's highest award for journalism, *Journalist of the Year* and was the first to win it twice. Moving to the United States, he reported the upheavals there in the late 1960s and 1970s. He marched with America's poor from Alabama to Washington, following the assassination of Martin Luther King. He was in the same room when Robert Kennedy, the presidential candidate, was assassinated in June 1968" (Johnpilger.com).

Portraits of people or of social and cultural conditions should be like tapestries woven out of a hundred different threads, or like mosaics made of many tiles. When there are holes in the tapestry or tiles missing, the entire picture is distorted. RLT [or *Persepolis* and other aforesaid memoirs] contains a few patches of truth. In this entirety, however, it is a tapestry with many holes, a mosaic that has every other piece missing (Keshavarz, 2007, p. 18).

Many scholars have challenged the referential truth of the autobiography believing that selective accounts depend upon the omission (purposely or otherwise) of various facts, or simply on lapses of memory. According to Chambers (2013), “auto/biography is often seen as a ‘truthful’, direct, and unmediated form but [...] it is in fact situated within and beyond genre conventions, and edited in ways that are far from innocent” (p. 6). Chambers actually distinguishes between autobiographers who are Muslim and diasporic and others. She believes the rules of writing an autobiography are adopted and subverted by this group. It is one of their strategies to use obliqueness to reluctantly rejecting the discussions about oneself and elaborating more on a collective identity. As Anderson argues, “this may be part of a deliberate strategy employed by many non-Western and diasporic auto/biographers to incorporate occasional silences and elision into their writing” (Anderson as cited in Chambers, 2013, p. 3). Therefore, “it is misleading to identify individuals as being somehow emblematic of the history of a whole nation” (Rushdie as cited in Chambers, 2013, p. 5). According to this point of view, works like *Persepolis* may not be considered as cultural and historical realities or true renditions, as they cannot be impartial narratives. Similarly, Raymond Federman, adheres to the belief in “the impossibility of recapturing the historical reality” (as cited in Charlson, 2001, p. 91). The same line of thought is followed by Kate Millett:

Of course it is impossible to tell the truth. For example, how does one know it? I will not belabour the difficulty by telling you how hard I have tried. And if compulsion forces me to tell the truth, it may also lead me into error, or invention (as cited in Miller, 2007, p. 538).

However, as Elliott reminds us, “with postmodern understandings of the constructed nature of subjectivity, comes a challenge to the autobiographical subject. As the self is a constructed fiction, so are the autobiographical narratives that define it” (Elliott, 2003, p. 3). Studies of the transnational approach to memoir writing suggests some more possibilities in considering the memoirs as genres that “create effects of reality and truth that are central to the ways the world is understood” (Whitlock, 2008, p. 8). Helen Buss argues that the memoir is a fluid and dynamic network that “personalise history and historicise the personal. They are about individuals, and they are also about an event, an era, an institution, or an identity” (Buss as cited in Whitlock, 2008, p. 7). The French critic Philippe Lejeune has famously defined the autobiographical genre as “a retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality” (1982, p. 193). Notably, Paul de Man (1979) has argued that memoirs make

it impossible to tell what is true by fictional (ised) components. In this view, autobiography should be separated from fiction. This suggests the question that: “is it autobiography if parts of it are not true? Is it fiction if parts of it are?” (Lynda Barry, 2002). This line of thinking is worth investigating as other interpretations, similarly, challenge the nature itself of the autobiography as a literary genre and as a truthful narration/rendition. If a fiction means that a piece of work is not factual, then *Persepolis* is definitely not a fiction with regard to reflecting and illustrating critical moments in Iranian history. Through descriptions of the revolution and the war with Iraq, Satrapi reports her traumatic experiences and the hardships she underwent. The revolution and the war with Iraq, on which Satrapi abundantly relates her views, are not fictional events. “Memoir by definition”, according to Anne Whitehead, “describes experiences that the author has lived through” (2004, p. 31). Under the influence of Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*, Satrapi’s *Persepolis* is therefore believed to belong to the “fiction side of the ledger” (Charlson, 2001, p. 91). The prize-winning *Maus II* was firstly labelled as fiction in *The New York Times*’ best-seller list. This was because the editors believed that a comic book with humans illustrated with animal heads cannot be considered as a true story. Only after Spiegelman himself asked the editors, the placement of *Maus* has been changed to non-fiction. Through using the “photographic facts”, Spiegelman “crafts an aesthetic of post memory to emphasize the subjective world of emotions and fantasies as an important part of memory, autobiography and photography” (Elliott, 2003, p. ii).

*Persepolis* reflects the experiences of Satrapi’s coming of age and according to her declarations, she added elements of fiction to be able to tell her story. Mary Jo Netiz believes that “all knowledge is partial” and is inspired by the inhabitants in locations and times (p. 56). Satrapi’s *Persepolis* is confirmed to be the personal story of an upper-class woman which is reflecting the life of her own group or culture as victims of misogynist policies of the Islamic Republic.<sup>70</sup> Satrapi never claimed that she has illustrated the *reality*; her Iranian story claimed to be written from a very “subjective” point of view and that it cannot be a “fair point of view” in representing the whole Iranian society (Satrapi in Walt, 2008). By insisting on the truthfulness of the events that actually happened during the revolution in Iran, *Persepolis* blurs the borders between fact and fiction. Satrapi’s *Persepolis* “might more properly fall under the category of what Linda Hutcheon calls ‘historiographic metafiction’, which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages” (Charlson, 2001, p. 94). Henceforth, “*Persepolis* is not purely fact, it is also fiction, in the sense that the reader views the truth through the multiple perspectives of the narration and the comic” (Meier, 2009). My argument in the third chapter will focus on the ambiguous status of

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<sup>70</sup> Feminist standpoint perspective believes “that an individual’s actual location in the social and physical world and the work that s/he does there shapes her/his understandings” (Netiz, 2011, p. 55).

*Persepolis* as an autobiography which is wavering between fact and fiction. Failure in considering *Persepolis* as a post-modern unconventional autobiography will lead to pigeonholing it as either a fact or fiction. This is the first step in straying from the dynamic nature of autobiographies and can be the source of biased orientalist/occidentalist judgements.

### **Summary of chapters**

Chapter 1 examines Satrapi's concerns over the undemocratic and dictatorial nature of the Islamic Republic. In her interview with Powells, she declared that Iranian officials are dictators and democracy is an illusion (Satrapi in Dave, 2006). She has also mentioned that, she would never go back to her country unless democracy is accomplished there. Regarding this declaration, this chapter explores the complex nature of democracy and the need to justification and argumentation of its compatibility with an Islamic system. Particularly, I have chosen to analyse Khomeini's theorisation of, and approach to, *velayat-e faqih* as discussed in *Hokumat-e Islami*. The rationale of my choice is to reflect on the political and theological thought of Ayatollah Khomeini, a controversial figure in the "West" with episodes such as the *Satanic Verses* controversy,<sup>71</sup> as applied by the current ruling system in Iran. The point here is differentiating between the systems of *velayat-e faqih* from that of Islam. By reflecting on the complexities of religious democracy and the critique of Khomeini's *velayat-e faqih*, I hope to contribute to a more nuanced, and critical debate on democracy in Iran as well as Islam in today's world.

To clarify the ambiguities and complexities of Iranian political system and the emergence, formation and application of *velayat-e faqih* as the system of governance in Iran, a history of *olama*'s relationship with the rulers before Khomeini is necessary. This history starts from sixteenth century Safavid dynasty which established Shi'ism as the formal state religion in Iran. Initially, the role of *olama* was limited to providing living directions for the community of believers. The authority and position of *olama* developed towards the end of the nineteenth century and with the inception of Qajar dynasty. In fact, the Qajar period is marked by the presence of *olama* in politics. Started with the tobacco concession, the *olama*'s presence in politics lead to the establishment of the constitutionalism. This movement was to limit the authority of rulers especially in granting different advantages to foreign powers and to Islamicise the country. Needless to say that, the Constitutional Revolution was the starting point in shaping disagreements between *olama* in Iranian history. Aspirations to establish a complete Islamic state which is ruled by *olama* as the deputies of the Hidden Imam started

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<sup>71</sup> Salman Rushdie's novel *Satanic Verses* (1988) was accused of blasphemy for some of its contents. In 1989, Imam Khomeini issued a *hokm* (order) – presented in the media as *fatwa* – in which he condemned Rushdie to death and urged Muslims to kill him. A series of attempted killings took place, none successful. Khomeini's unequivocal order is reported in Axworthy (2013, p. 298).

with Khomeini. The theory of the *velayat-e faqih* as applied in today's Iran is actually Khomeini's mystical and political reading of jurisprudence. His denial of the political legitimacy of the rulers before the Islamic Revolution lead to the formation of the full-fledged political responsibility of *olama*. Ayatollah Khomeini equated the authority of the *faqih* with that of the Prophet and infallible Imams. Debates over the legitimacy of the authority of the *faqih* has thereof been very controversial post-Khomeini. Considering the Islamic governance as a divine system creates divine duty for citizens, the defiance of which is considered as a sin. Based on Khomeini's interpretation of divine duties for citizens, Satrapi's banishment from her home country after publishing her work, which was read as anti-Iranian by the Islamic Republic, is explicated. Needless to say that, Ayatollah Khomeini's political thought has never been wholeheartedly embraced by all *olama* or the Iranian nation. Many have been critical to the absolute level of authority of the *faqih* and argued the electoral process of choosing a *faqih* and his accountability.

Chapter 2 is intended as the analysis of Satrapi's critique of compulsory<sup>72</sup> *hejab* (veiling) in Iran. *Persepolis* discusses the imposition of the veil as the epitome of state-enforced gender discrimination. In so doing, Satrapi continues a discourse initiated by the best-selling autobiography of Betty Mahmoody (*Not without My Daughter*, 1987) and followed by Azar Nafisi (*Reading Lolita in Tehran*, 2003), and Shirin Ebadi (*Iran Awakening*, 2007).<sup>73</sup> It has been argued that these autobiographies with their critical position towards Iranian policies – irrespective of their actual motivations – legitimise the perspective that Islam is indeed an oppressor of women. Scholars like Marandi, Mahmoud and Nash believe that these accounts are normally articulated in the form of “Western” discourse of rights into Muslim societies, focusing on the oppression of women by men. Therefore, the aforementioned memoirs are dubbed as neo-orientalist texts. Satrapi's position on the *hejab* is reinforced throughout the book by means of irony, humour and the artistic rendering of the idea of veiling itself. The articulations of gender inequalities in an Islamic context suggest the feminist efforts to reclaim women's rights in Islamic countries. Accordingly, a group of feminists in Iran started a different discourse which is understood separated from the current political and male-dominated interpretations, paying special attention to the interpretation of the original sacred text rather than the historical and cultural dynamics. Satrapi and Ebadi's argument on gender inequality in Iran is to a larger degree in line with this movement. They are in fact objecting

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<sup>72</sup> “One month after the revolution in March 1979, revolutionary leader Ayatollah Khomeini announced that ‘women should not be naked in these ministries. There is nothing wrong with women's employment. But they must be clothed according to religious standards’” (Naghibi, 2007, p. 59).

<sup>73</sup> “There is a substantial body of work on the veil in the diasporic Iranian feminist community; while some diasporic Iranian feminists acknowledge the complexities of the [veiling] issue, a regrettable number tend to fall back on the discourse of the veil as oppressive, thus endorsing a colonial feminist position of the unquestioned naturalness of the unveiled body” (Naghibi, 2007, pp. 62-63).



to the relationship between government and religion in the formation of gender identities and roles. It is actually the state that reinforces the patriarchal power structure. According to Asma Barlas (2001), the “contextual” and “extratextual realities that shaped the understanding of the original text of the Qur’an and its interpretation” can be questioned (p. 1). Barlas believes that the Qur’anic teachings have provided women with equality and possibility of egalitarianism. In other words, the patriarchal and political interpretations of the *shari’ah* circumscribe the public engagement of women. In her opinion, the Taliban is an extreme example of this view, and the Islamic Republic with its regulations on women’s dress code in public is another example. Furthermore, some scholars like Valentine M. Moghadam believe that a secular framework for women’s rights should be embraced by many religious or Islamic activists in Iran. “This is because their project of reinterpreting Islam and challenging patriarchy cannot be realized within the theoretic framework currently in place in the Islamic Republic of Iran” (Moghadam as cited in Barlow, 2008, p. 40).

This chapter analyses Satrapi’s position, message and intention in the framework of feminist concerns and discourses. The objection of the autobiographers does not necessarily put them under the banner of feminism as their main objection is the ‘foundationalism’ of the Islamic Republic, which they believe has violated the basic human rights. Satrapi’s rejection of being a feminist is thus being explored with reference to her purpose of authoring her work. Her self-designed way of *hejab*, her rebellious position towards the *hejab* and her wilful rejection of feminism have all given voice to her intention to wipe off the binary notions of “Western”/ “Eastern” woman. Her purposeful rejection of feminism is due to the fact that different notions of feminism (mostly third wave) have actually failed to include race, colour, ethnicity or religion. Although the pluralistic nature of feminism has always been the concern of feminists, however, the current clichés proved otherwise.

The state policy of mandatory veiling (the *hejab*), the centre of a heated debate in Iran as well as in the rest of the world, is an aspect of Iranian culture that is informed by, and depends on, the history of Shi’a Islam and the identity of Iran as a modern nation. If *Persepolis* (and similar narratives) is to be used in educational and public contexts (e.g. media) it is necessary to engage with a more nuanced analysis of the Iranian culture. This should include the history of *kashf-e hejab* (removing the veil) in Iran, and the political significance of veiling in order to give meaning to anti-imperialist policies of the Islamic Republic, and the debates of the *hejab* as a sign of empowerment and/or anti-colonial signifier.

Chapter 3 analyses the discourses regarding the “objectivity, truth, and authenticity” of an autobiography (Hathaway, 2011, p. 251). This revolves around *Persepolis* and its epigones, with particular emphasis on their being semi-fictionalised. Following Satrapi’s “political

book” (Bonzano, 2013), *Persepolis*, which recounts the post-revolutionary Iran (1979), *Persepolis 2.0* and *Zahra’s Paradise* are two recent graphic novels which tell the story of post-election Iran (2009) and the Green Movement<sup>74</sup> in a similar way to Satrapi’s *Persepolis*. It is not surprising that Satrapi’s concerns have been the source of inspiration for other diaspora Iranians.

On one hand, one of the redeeming points of *Persepolis* is providing its audiences with an “accurate time-table portrayal of the political events that took place from 1979 to 1984 - a chaotic and turbulent time in Iran’s modern history” (Barzegar, 2012, p. 1). On the other hand, it is argued that the detailed and complicated history of Iran is impossible to be depicted through Satrapi’s subjective point of view. This chapter is intended to analyse the study of autobiography and reclaims its difference from an historical account or a biography or media reports. This is, however, controversial as some scholars believe that an autobiography cannot be impartial especially when it is affected by different psychological, emotional and traumatic experiences of its creator. This jeopardises the sense of sincerity or authenticity of an autobiography. According to Lejeune, autobiography is “the retrospective prose narrative that someone writes concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality” (Eakin, 1989, p. viii). The word like ‘narrative’ and ‘story’ in Lejeune’s definition can be debated against the concept of “sincerity, which is at once the *sine qua non* of autobiography as a genre” (Eakin, 1989, p. ix). In fact, the relationship between the narrative fiction and an autobiographical fact is debated as not an easy one. Elements of trauma and misery can affect the narration of truth. This becomes even more serious in case of Muslim autobiographies and their popularity in “Western” capitalist market. Confrontation of fact and fiction in Muslim autobiographies especially those of the exiles can overwhelmingly affect their representations of Islamic culture.

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<sup>74</sup> The Green Movement is one of the most important challenges that “shaped spontaneously in the days immediately following the presidential elections in June 2009” in the history of the Islamic republic after the 1979 revolution (Nabavi, 2012, p. xi).

## CHAPTER ONE

### ANALYSIS OF SATRAPI'S CONCERN OVER DEMOCRACY IN IRAN

#### Introduction

In an interview with Walt (2008), Satrapi was asked what would take her back to Iran. She replied: “the day we have a democracy, I will probably go back to Iran”. This affirms that she believes there is no democracy in Iran currently under the Islamic Republic.<sup>75</sup> In another interview with Powells, Satrapi declared:

We knew we were living under a dictatorship (in Iran) so we never believed in what they said. We knew that our leaders were dictators. Here (in America), people believe that they live in a democracy, which is an illusion. The real war is not between the West and the East. The real war is between intelligent and stupid people. There is much more in common between George Bush and the fanatics in my country than between me and the fanatics of my country. There is much more common ground between me and normal people here in America who don't want that. As an Iranian, I feel much closer to an American who thinks like me than to the bearded guy of my country (Satrapi in Dave, 2006).

In the above examples, Satrapi does not seem to believe that democracy exists either in Iran or America. Satrapi's work, as interpreted by *intentio lectoris*, seems to ignore her position towards the political system in the US and the leadership and policies of President Bush. It seems as if global audiences, heavily influenced by biased international criticism against Iran, are unlikely to grasp the sense of Satrapi's *intentio auctoris*. In a time marked by strong international bias against Islam in general, this is even more difficult to detect.<sup>76</sup> Irrespective of Satrapi's intention, her accounts towards the Iranian system could be concurred to bring about the demonised picture of the Islamic Republic as undemocratic and oppressive in its nature and history.

Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, and more recently after the 2009 presidential election, the violations of human rights have been brought to attention. Diverse uprisings and movements occurred in recent years protesting the autocratic nature of the Islamic government in Iran. None or very little nuanced analysis of such concerns has been debated so far. Some memoirists aspire for better democratization of the country and not necessarily overthrowing

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<sup>75</sup> In another example, when she was asked about the reason why she had to leave Iran for the second time, she briefly mentioned her unhappy marriage as one result and stated: “I wanted to do my artistic work, and in Iran you have censorship. It was difficult for me to do the work I wanted to do” (Satrapi in Walt, 2008). In this example, she considers the Iranian law system as limiting her capabilities. Satrapi's main point which she seems to be unhappy with, is more about the specific censorship of laws in the Islamic Republic and the general censorship in “Western” media.

<sup>76</sup> Ironically, the “West” now needs Iran more than ever to cope with the expansion and the threat posed by the self-nominated IS (Islamic State). It will be interesting to see how the situation evolves and whether Iran, in view of the current situation, would still be enlisted in the “axis of evil”.

the current doctrines of the Islamic Republic i.e. *velayat-e faqih* as articulated by Ayatollah Khomeini and enshrined in the Iranian political system while some others seek to overthrow the Islamic regime. Satrapi's position, in this regard in my opinion, is that of the former group. As her primary concern is being an autonomous individual, her definition of democracy pertains to respecting the human rights. In her views, human rights are universal values including the freedom of speech and thought and action. She animates her agency free from the force of religion or politics and thus advocates the separation of religion from the state. Satrapi supports a reformative and progressive approach to religion which adheres to a private and personal system of belief. It can be argued that her secular orientations and her dislike for the application of *shari'ah* in the context of society by the government have come to conclude her absolute repugnance for religion or anything religious. However, based on her *intentio auctoris*, and her rejection of the political systems in Iran and the "West" (America or France), it seems that Satrapi's focus is spinning around the inclusive and pluralistic nature of secularism rather than the evacuation of life from religion. What Satrapi considers as democracy is respecting differences and maximising the interactions. In order to analyse Satrapi's declaration of democracy as an illusion in both Iran and the "West", this chapter examines firstly the meaning of democracy both at the global level and within religious contexts. Discussions of democracy in Islam in general or Iran in particular cannot be separated from the modern religious or political history of both. This gives great importance to understanding the religious authority and justifying the politics of the Islamic Republic in Iran, as well as clarifying the accusations of *Islam setizi* against *Persepolis*.

According to Diamond & Plattner (2009), "The prestige of democracy began to soar" (p. xi) in different parts of the world today, however as a political aspiration, "democracy is everywhere praised, yet nowhere achieved" (Blaug & Schwarzmantel, 2001, p. 1). As a practice, democracy is subject to different challenges. Many countries are in a status between authoritarianism and democracy "variously labelled by political scientists as semidemocracy, pseudodemocracy, competitive authoritarianism, electoral authoritarianism, or a hybrid regime" (Diamond & Plattner, 2009, p. x). Based on this and according to Diamond and Plattner, Iran with a few other countries such as Russia or Venezuela is a "nondemocracy that has been challenging the Western democratic model with increasing self-confidence" (2009, p. xiii). However, according to Goddard, the index of democracy produces a number of surprises in the world today. Goddard clearly differentiates between the practice of democracy and the country's foreign policy. He illustrated this contrast by using two samples in the Gulf region. On the "Western" side of the Gulf, Saudi Arabia is deeply oriented towards the "West" in its foreign policies. The Saudi government has firm military agreements with the US and is highly dependent on the American oil companies, but "it does not make any pretence of being

democratic, being governed essentially by the Sa'ud family without an even elected advisory body" (Goddard, 2002, p. 3). On the other side of the Gulf, Iran "despite its virulently anti-Western rhetoric over the past 20 years [...] with the often repeated descriptions of the United States as the 'Great Satan' and Britain and France as 'little Satans', is a functioning democracy" (Goddard, 2002, p. 3). Goddard believes that not only Iran does have formal elections, "it also has elections whose results are not known until the votes are counted!" (2002, p. 3). Based on these opposing views, "democracies can differ greatly in the degree to which they encourage consensus versus competition, shared power versus majoritarian rule, and public authority versus private action" (Diamond & Plattner, 2009, p. xiv). The levels of democracy also vary in different democratic regimes. This is primarily discussed in the context of Islam's compatibility with democracy. Islam has always been understood as a monolithic religion in which the politics and religion are overlapping. The spirituality is defined at a public level to figure Islam's original message as an *ummah*. Many thinkers believe that Islam is so tightly insulated with traditions that it contains no glimmer of hope to deal with a modern and complex challenge like democracy or human rights. However, as Goddard argues, "Islam and Islamic world in other words, are not the same, since the former involves certain ideals and aspirations, while the latter represents concrete realities, and as with all ideals the Islamic world practices Islam to differing degrees" (Goddard, 2002, p. 3). In Iran, challenges have been over the belief that the Islamic traditions that predominate in Iranian political system inhibits the emergence of a democratic system. Obviously, in the case of Iran, most critics' concern is not just Islam in general, rather it is the *velayat-e faqih* as a ruling system. This doctrine "allows the clergy to exercise a veto over all branches of government, to screen potential political candidates and to appoint the leader of the feared Revolutionary Guard, among other powers" (Marineau, n.d., p. 93). As the legitimacy of all political decisions depends upon the confirmation and authorization of the *vali-ye faqih*, then *velayat-e faqih* is argued as not compatible with democracy. *Velayat-e faqih* in Iran is simply one reading of Islam, hence, it seems quite essential to consider discussions of democracy within the Iranian system as *one* version of the 'Islamic world' not the only representative of the Islam. The argument continues to address the religious, social and cultural factors in Iranian system that can sustain or undermine democracy.

The last part of this chapter analyses the ways through which Iran and the Islamic Shi'a culture in general are represented in the world media especially "Western". This will shed light on Satrapi's *intentio auctoris* in authoring her work. With the strategic significance of Iran for the "West" especially post the American hostage crisis, representations of Iran and the Islamic culture were not far from "certain xenophobic stereotypes of non-Western foreign subjects" (Fayyaz & Shirazi, 2013, p. 53). Regarding the history of the relationship of Iran with the US,

the basis of the scholarly inquiry has shown that “the link between press and policy is enormously complex and subtle” (Dorman & Farhang, 1987, p. 2). This does not necessarily mean that there is a cause and effect relations but rather, it suggests that “if the press does not make foreign or defence policy, in some important ways it helps set the boundaries within which policy can be made” (Dorman & Farhang, 1987, p. 2). It is argued that the interplay of the media and political powers is the reality behind the messages being transferred through media. This clarifies Satrapi’s critical position towards both the undemocratic structure of “Western” countries as well as her dissatisfaction with the journalists. While this position makes sense with reference to the orientalist representations of Iran, however, I try to show how some media have escaped the political influences and worked independently to a degree that they have harshly questioned those in power. An example of the Watergate affair and the case of John Pilger will clearly demonstrate the great respect towards an independent and free press. As identified in Satrapi’s objection, the standard for criticism of the media is relative through investigating the reports of old orientalist clichés which denigrates Iran as an inferior with propensity to extremism or as “anti-Western” incapable of making political relationships with the “Western” countries. This gives meaning to Satrapi’s *intentio auctoris* to write her work. This chapter will be closed by representations of Islamic rituals in post-revolutionary memoirs. It is argued that Satrapi and other’s representations have shown not much difference from those of the biased media. The orientalist or stereotypical representations of Islamic rituals in many biased media and memoirs can be attributed to the current political complexities. However, considering Satrapi’s position as a royal family individual whose lifestyle is different from that of the majority of Iranians, one should not expect her to support ideas or rules that limit her individual freedom and autonomy.

### **History of religious leadership and political authority pre Islamic Revolution**

The relationship between religion and state in Iran is of great importance due to the locus of authority in Shi’ism which resides in the family of the Prophet, namely the Twelve infallible Imams. The doctrine of Imamate, as mentioned earlier, is the focal point around which the religious authority and political governance revolves. During the Occultation of the last Imam Al-Mahdi, the vacuum of leadership of the Islamic community is filled by jurists and *olama* who are considered as his indirect deputies in his absence. Shi’a political thought is extrapolated from a spectrum of beliefs in charismatic authority of the jurists. This spectrum ranges from complete deputyship and authority of the jurists to limited expounding Islamic matters. There has always been disagreement between *olama* regarding the scope of the political authority of jurists. The neglect of such debate could be to the detriment of understanding the theological basis for hierocracy state relationships in Iran as well as understanding the reasons behind the accusation of *Islam setizi* by Iranian officials.

The turning point in the history of religion-state relations is paying attention to early sixteenth century Safavids dynasty in Iran, which established Shi'ism as the formal state religion. Shi'ism in Iran started in 1501 by the Safavid dynasty.<sup>77</sup> "The Safavids enforced adherence to Shi'ism as a matter of state policy... Shi'ism became deeply entrenched in the cultural, intellectual and political life of Iran" (Axworthy, 2013, p. 20).<sup>78</sup> "Both activist and quietist attitudes to prevailing authority could be deduced from the Imami belief, but it is clear that the latter came gradually to dominate the mainstream of Shi'ism, leaving its trace also on the Safavid and post-Safavid Shi'ism" in Iran (Algar, 1969, p. 2). The most considerable contribution of the *olama* to the community was based on providing living directions based on the exemplary models and imitations, *ijtihad*. In this regard, the *olama* are the source of guidance for the community of believers and are considered as the intermediaries between the infallible Imam, divine source and the people. As following the guidance of Imam is the unquestionable duty of a Shi'a Muslim, at the time of his concealment, the institution of the *mojtahid* had the merit of providing the authority (not necessarily political) "for it implies a greater acquaintance with the religious law" (Algar, 1969, p. 9).<sup>79</sup> Addressing the political realities by *olama* after the proclamation of Shi'ism by Shah Isma'il in 1501, "along with the Usuli school's triumph over the Akhbari<sup>80</sup> school, which allowed the former to expand the role of reason and rationality in religious discourse and expand their scope of authority, gradually culminated in Ayatollah Khomeini's concept of *velayat-e faqih*" (Mavani, 2013, p. xi). Through exercising practical functions, the authority and position of *olama* developed towards the end of eighteenth century and the demise of Safavids. Contesting the legitimacy of the state never happened in Safavids, however, the Qajar period is marked by the *olama* having considered themselves as the regents of the Hidden Imam. Admittedly, they never questioned the legitimacy of the Qajar rulers but objected to their autocratic policies and their cooperation with the European imperial powers. During the period of *mashrutiyyat* or constitutionalism

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<sup>77</sup> "Islam came to Iran in the eighth century, and the religious identity of Shiite Islam has dominated since it was established by the Safavids in the sixteenth century as the state religion" (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi (1994, p. 11).

<sup>78</sup> "From the sixteenth until the present century, Iranianism and Shi'ism blended for many people. Shi'ism was 'neither a mere reflection of Iranian social relations nor its sole determinant'; rather, it became 'inextricably interwoven within Iranian social relations.'" (Sedghi, 2007, p. 35).

<sup>79</sup> "Whereas one of the principles of jurisprudence in Sunni Islam is the consensus of the entire living community, in Shi'ism the consensus is restricted to the *olama*, both the living and the dead" (Algar, 1969, p. 9).

<sup>80</sup> The Akhbari movement or the traditionalist "considered all binding norms to be explicitly contained in the 'Traditions' of the Prophet and the Twelve Imams, and which therefore denied the juristic authority of the doctors of religious jurisprudence (*mojtahid*) to deduce binding norms from the sources of the Sacred Law" (Arjomand, 2009, p. 46). The Usuli movement (rationalism) "was launched by Aqa Muhammad Baqir Bihbahani (1705-1803)" (Arjomand, 2009, p. 46) put an end to Akhbari movement and "became established as the sole authoritative method of Imamite jurisprudence, although the hadith-related sciences continued to develop as required by *al-ijtihad al shar'i*" (Sachedina, 1988, p. 21). The latter school was the source of inspiration for many religious students during the Qajar period.

(1906-1911), some *olama* (and not all of them) only referred to restricting the Shah's authority through *shura* and *shari'ah*.

Rarely mentioned clearly, this contradiction was the main source of friction between *olama* and political power throughout the nineteenth century. In a number of events, the most important of which was the tobacco concession,<sup>81</sup> the state effectively alienated itself from people. The repeal of the tobacco concession in 1892 was the prelude of the Constitutional Revolution and reiterated the opposition of a group of *olama* with the state – Many *olama* opposed the Constitutional Revolution and fully supported the Shah. The presence of *olama* gave new direction to the ruling status and domestic situation of Iran which was under the increasing involvement of foreign powers. Towards the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the Qajar dynasty in Iran started to disintegrate and collapse. Amir Kabir,<sup>82</sup> prime minister of the Qajar Shah/ruler, was assassinated by the Shah because of his plans and reforms to make the country independent from foreign powers. In fact, he was the first person to stand against colonialism, the foreign political and economic invasions, whereas the king was highly dependent on Russia and Great Britain and had viewed his reign's continuity in terms of foreign support. The Shah gave many different advantages to foreign merchants and thus limited the opportunities for domestic merchants, which made them vulnerable and unable to compete with numerous European merchants. This caused dissatisfaction among Iranians, *olama* and tradesmen. Many *olama* were especially displeased with the king and his policies for two main reasons. First, the Qajar dynasty granted a number of concessions to the Russian and British Empires, and second, they let foreigners dominate the political, economic and cultural system of Iran. It was the beginning of the dissatisfaction of religious and ordinary people with state politics. "The strong position of the *ulema* in Iranian society meant that when secular authority failed or was challenged, almost always the *ulema* (or at least some of them) emerged as leaders of political dissent" (Axworthy, 2013, p. 22).

The political history of Iran has never lacked the presence of *olama* as representatives of religion. There has never been absolute separation between religion and politics in Iranian history even at the time of secular governors. In March 1891, the decree (*fatwa*)<sup>83</sup> of Ayatollah

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<sup>81</sup> In this monopoly, "all rights concerning the sale and distribution of tobacco inside Iran, and the export of all tobacco produced in Iran, were vested in the Imperial Tobacco Corporation, which in turn was to pay the Iranian government £15 million a year" (Algar, 1969, p. 206).

<sup>82</sup> Amir Kabir (1807-1852) was the chief minister of the Shah of Qajar dynasty and the most capable figure in modernizing Iran. See Daniel. E. L. (2012). *The History of Iran*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). California, US: The Greenwood histories of the Modern Nations.

<sup>83</sup> "The tradition of issuing politically significant edicts or legal rulings (*fatwas*) has a long history in modern Shiite history. It extends back to the dramatic 'Tobacco Protests' instigated by the 1890 *fatwa* of Ayatollah Seyed Hassan Shirazi against the 'Tobacco Concession' granted by Naser al-Din Shah to the British Imperial Tobacco Company" (A. Sadri and M. Sadri, 2010, p. 173).



Mirzaye Shirazi<sup>84</sup> cancelled the Tobacco concession granted to a British Major, Gerald Talbot. The Tobacco Regie was established in 1880 by Nasir al-Din Shah, Qajar king, with the British Empire. In this monopoly, all producers and owners of tobacco in Iran were forced to sell their products to agents of the Regie, who in turn could resell it at their own prices. This monopoly violated the working relations between producers and sellers and jeopardised the job security of a significant number of people in Iran. Since then, mass protests began to emerge in opposition to foreign domination under the supervision and support of *olama* to protect national interests. According to Keddie, the Tobacco movement was very significant in Iran because: “Iranians saw for the first time that it was possible to win out against the Shah and foreign interests [...] there is a direct line from the coalition which participated in the tobacco movement [...] culminating in the Constitutional Revolution” (Keddie, 1966, p. 131). By the end of June 1906, in the wake of the relentless efforts of *olama* and tradesmen, the Shah of Qajar was forced to issue the decree which created the first parliament in Iran. The Constitutional Revolution (1906) had actually limited the Shah’s despotic rule and corruption. In order to ensure that the principles of Islam were established and the laws conformed to Islamic norms, it was therefore officially enacted that at all times there should be at least five *mojtahids* presented at the committee to supervise the process of law-making. These religious scholars had the right to reject and repudiate any laws which were at variance with the Islamic *shari’ah*. According to the *mashrutiyyat*, the Shah would still be the ruler of the country but his powers would be limited by the people in the forms of the parliament and by Islamic law through the *mojtahids*. Thus, one must not forget that the relationship of religion with the state started in Iran many years before (i.e. Tobacco Regie) the Islamic Revolution. Tobacco concession united many *olama* and the nation against the state. Those *olama* that supported it played an important role in mobilising their followers but they were not the only agents and certainly not the only leaders of the nation. According to Algar, “throughout the century, objections not only to the state, but also to foreign aggression and encroachment, were voiced in Islamic rather than in nationalistic terms” (1969, p. 24). Towards the eve of Qajar rule and with the increasing opposition of the *olama* with the state, the background prepared for the demand of constitution. After obtaining the grant of constitution, with the condition of the systematic and dominant application of Islamic *shari’ah*, opposition of *olama* was renewed due to the incompatibility of the constitutional laws with Islam.

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<sup>84</sup> Mirzaye Shirazi (1814-1896) was the highest Shi’a authority who played a major role against the Regie. See Amirahmadi, H. (2012). *The Political economy of Iran under the Qajars*. London, United Kingdom: I. B. Tauris.

Shaykh Fazl Allah Nuri (1842-1909)<sup>85</sup> with Sayyid Muhammad Tabataba'i and Sayyid Abd Allah Bihbahani were the prominent *mojtahids* that supported the constitutional government. However, soon after its establishment, Shaykh Fazl Allah turned against the constitutionalists and declared that "the Islamicised constitution (*mashruteh-ye mashru'ah*) for which he had been fighting was different from that which came out of the Constitutional Revolution" (Ridgeon, 2005, p. 37). As Ridgeon states, "this conflict which led to a split amongst the leading *olama* and strengthened the tyrannical tendencies of the existing royal circle, can be rated as the first effective drawback the young Persian constitutional regime suffered" (2005, p. 38). The primary division among *olama* initiated with the Constitutional Revolution. In terms of legislative oversight (which later introduced in the constitution), those who were supporting the constitution believed that by designating at least five *mojtahid* in the parliament, the Islamic ordinances are guaranteed to be applied; while the anti-constitutionalists considered the nature of constitution to be against Islam. As mentioned earlier, Shaykh Fazl Allah Nuri who was among the supporters of the constitutionalism withdrew from his activities, denying the validity of legislations as for example the freedom of press. He believed this freedom "is detrimental to Islam because it does not allow any punishment for malicious accusation (*iftira*), backbiting (*ghaybat*), slander, obsession, abusive language, insult, and the like" (Ridgeon, 2005, p. 40). Some anti-constitutionalist *olama* believed that the current constitutionalism is just an imitation of foreign policies, while some others thought that it is the Islamic application of rules that is problematic, and would cause other nations not recognising Iran as a constitutional state. At this stage, constitutionalism was more a tool in the hands of *olama* to limit the ruler's power, and their role in this model was just supervisory "because they held that the messianic Imam's concealment rendered all forms of government imperfect and thus could be construed as usurping his exclusive right to govern" (Mavani, 2013, p. 185).

After the First World War, due to the unlimited political and economic influence of the Russian and British Empires, Iran had lost its political power and authority. The British Empire took advantage of Russia's retreat from Iran and asked Iran to devolve the authority of the Persian Cossack Brigade to them. Among all Cossack officers, Reza Khan became a Brigadier General with the support of Britain. The Qajar emperor who was overthrown was Satrapi's grandfather (2003, p. 22). Facing chaos and being on the verge of fragmentation, the Qajar dynasty was the centre of a political vacuum. As the only strong and functioning combatant, Reza Khan took the opportunity afforded by the British Empire and seized the capital in 1921.

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<sup>85</sup> He was a prominent opponent of the constitutional movement closely aligned with the shah – he only reluctantly accepted the constitution and talked about *mashruteh-ye mashru'ah* to limit *shura* and ensure the overall oversight over legislation of the *olama*.

He removed the Qajar Shah, crowned himself and established the Pahlavi dynasty. Reza Khan largely succeeded in overcoming Iran's interior and foreign threats with his strong army. He then decided to establish a republic to organise his plans for modernizing Iran. His reforms met with clerical dissidence, especially from Ayatollah Moddares<sup>86</sup> for one main reason. This reason was due to the previous experience regarding the establishment of such a republic in Turkey during the 1920s - for removing the religion from the everyday lives of people. A few days later, Reza Khan organised a meeting with religious scholars and *olama* to discuss the issues regarding their dissatisfaction about establishing a republic. He finally pleased them with his command to abolish the republic. With this step, Reza Khan enjoyed the *olama*'s support and satisfaction. He had also insisted that his relinquishment of his plans for a republic was due to his commitment to Islam and respecting the *olama* and strengthening the base of religiosity. The *olama* felt that a republican system is non-Islamic while a monarchy is more in line with Islam.

Hegemony and authoritarianism were just one perspective of Reza Khan's reign. The other perspective was his plans to modernize Iran. He started altering people's lives with his preliminary actions to delete the Qajari epithets and force people to choose a surname for themselves. This was his first action to get rid of the rest of the ostensible traces of the Qajars and provide the background to his formal and socio-economic transformations. However, this was the starting point. Soon a specific and formal dress code became compulsory for members of government staff. After his return from Turkey, and under the influence of secularism and "Western" hegemony, Reza Khan ordained a change in dress code for all people - both men and women - throughout the country. In this programme, men were supposed to wear "Western" style hats and women to remove their *hejab* in public. As mentioned before, and in line with anti-Islamic movements, in view of the position of the *hejab* in religious beliefs and in the social life of people, the policy of *kashf-e hejab* was significantly showing Reza Khan's bias towards "Westernization" and his dictatorship. In any case, this action faced resistance from the people, especially the *olama*. At the beginning of his reign, Reza Shah supported the *olama* to legitimize his rule. When his rejection of the constitutional laws was uncovered openly, pro-constitutionalist clergies started to oppose him. Among them, Ayatollah Seyyed Hasan Modarres (1870-1937) was the most prominent figure. He "tried to negotiate a settlement that left room for liberal government - but failed" (Axworthy, 2013, p. 37). Along with individual and public protests, the majority of people who considered such policies to be

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<sup>86</sup> Ayatollah Seyyed Hasan Moddares (1870-1937) was the notable Shi'a cleric in supporting the Iranian Constitutional revolution and was martyred during the reign of Reza Pahlavi. See Abrahamian, E. (2008). *A History of Modern Iran*. New York, US: The Cambridge University Press.

in contradiction with their religious beliefs refused to accept it. In order to make them silent, the Shah ordered the massacre of the demonstrators.

This issue was never underestimated by Ayatollah Khomeini who was very young at that time. In many cases, he used the opportunity to complain and reject the absolute authority and “Western” style government promoted by the Shah. Following a secular nationalist model, Reza Khan tried to secularise and modernize Iran by publicly and loudly blaming Islam and the *olama* for the country’s backwardness. After Reza Khan, Mohammad Reza continued on this line. In 1950, a constituent assembly was held on behalf of the Shah and franchised him the right to close down the parliament. In this assembly, the people had no role in choosing representatives or in changing existing legislation. Reza Shah installed a secular dictatorship which was different from the “Western” political system. In the “West”, there are liberal democracies which was not the system that Reza Shah implemented. So, he initiated socio-cultural “Westernisation”<sup>87</sup> but not really the establishment of a “Western” liberal democracy. Ayatollah Khomeini objected to a mere replication of the secular political system, and stressed the importance of a convergence between the *olama* and the people of Iran in order to defy the Shah’s dictatorship. In his period of political contention against the Pahlavis, he repeatedly referred to this system and condemned the Shah for breaking constitutional rules.<sup>88</sup> Ayatollah Khomeini<sup>89</sup> was the most prominent power in opposition to such policies.

According to Mavani, “the phase of aspiring to establish an Islamic state begins with Ayatollah Khomeini outlining his theory of the jurist’s governance in 1953, expanding the jurist’s scope of power and authority to encompass direct involvement in political issues” (2013, p. 185). In fact, Khomeini’s reading of the Islamic government “arises from the historical development of the Shi’i clergy in Iran since the nineteenth century, during which they became socio-economically independent from state support and politically more self-confident” (Scharbrodt, 2014, p. 382). Ayatollah Khomeini’s spiritual and mystical inclinations had important consequences such as denial of the political legitimacy to rulers like the Pahlavis. This is a radical departure from the views of *olama* in the past who objected to the policies of the Shahs or attempted to restrict their powers, but never questioned their

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<sup>87</sup> “Members of the Iranian ruling class, specifically its shahs, were eager players in the technological modernization of their country; they were great admirers of “Western” gadgetry, quick to see its appeal and potential domestic use, especially as instruments of coercion and political control” (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1994, p. 44).

<sup>88</sup> Ayatollah Khomeini’s objections to the constitutional laws of 1906 were mostly that it was not based upon Islam. In his *Hokumat-e Eslami* (1970), he frequently attacks the constitution of 1906 and declared: “what connections do the articles of the constitution...have with Islam?” (Khomeini in Mottahedeh, 1987, p. 380).

<sup>89</sup> Khomeini studied Islamic philosophy and *erfan*, mysticism, in *hozeh*. He had also special interests in contemporary politics. Some *olama* of his time were more conservative than him, and would rarely get involved in politics. According to Mottahedeh, mysticism and politics may appear strange to secular thought, but it definitely has a specific meaning in Shi’a Islam:

legitimacy. In his views, the political authority during the Occultation of the Twelfth Imam is upon the clerical body and it is their responsibility to form the Islamic government. The guardianship of a just and knowledgeable jurist cannot be realised if the Prophet had failed in appointing a successor who would execute the laws in the Islamic society after himself. *Velayat-e faqih* is thus not debated in other schools of Islam or other types of Shi'a doctrine "because it is only this school of Shi'i thought that maintains belief in the Hidden Imam who continues to guide his community through his generally designated deputies" (Sachedina, 1988, p. 6). Expanding the discourse of the Usuli School, Ayatollah Khomeini represented a sharp distance from the Shi'i traditions as a quietist model. According to Algar, "for Khomeini, however, spirituality and mysticism have never implied social withdrawal or political quietism, but rather the building up of a fund of energy that finds its natural expression on the socio-political plane" (Algar as cited in Ridgeon, 2005, p. 197). Ayatollah Khomeini's position as an *arif* (mystic) and the *faqih* (jurist) made him combine mysticism with juridical context and come to the concept of *velayat-e motlaq* of the clerical body. In this theory, a full-fledged political and social authority is given to a well-qualified jurist who is assuming the hidden Imam's deputy and possessing the prerogative to rule. Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic government built upon the idea of the integration of religion and politics in Islam. According to Khomeini, the governance of the *faqih*, as the highest religious authority is the ideal form of government.

The concept of *velayat-e faqih* was first promulgated in 1970 in Najaf, Iraq in a series of his lectures. According to Khomeini, the authority of a *faqih* in executing laws and establishing the government is the same as the authority of the Prophet and infallible Imams. However, this authority is not absolute in the sense that the *faqih* does not have authority over other *foqaha*.<sup>90</sup> This absence of hierarchy left the space open for other *foqaha* to supervise and control the *faqih* in power and does not refer to a collective government by a group of *foqaha*. As Khomeini was aware of the controversial nature of his *velayat-e faqih*, he gave examples of those clerics whose *fatwas* were treated as a political ruling such as the *fatwa* of Mirzaye Shirazi regarding the prohibition of the consumption of tobacco. Nevertheless, the doctrine of *velayat-e faqih* has never been wholeheartedly embraced by all Shi'i *olama* or all Iranians, among them the post-revolutionary memoirists.

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<sup>90</sup> *Foqaha* is the plural form of *faqih*. "Faqih is one learned in the principles and ordinances of Islamic law, or more generally, in all aspects of the faith" (Khomeini, 1970, p. 7). According to Ayatollah Khomeini, the *faqih* has the same authority as the Prophet and Imams in terms of function and authority (p. 34).

### Velayat-e faqih: religious history

After the Prophet Mohammad's death (circa 632 CE),<sup>91</sup> Islam entered a new era of crisis. There was disagreement between factions on who was to succeed the Prophet. A minority party (Ar. Shi'a)<sup>92</sup> saw the legal successor in Muhammad's son-in-law and cousin, Ali (Ar. 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib; c.ca 600-661 CE), who was allegedly appointed *mawlā* (Ar. master)<sup>93</sup> in Ghadir-e Khom by the Prophet Muhammad himself.<sup>94</sup> Despite Shi'as' belief, the caliphate (Ar. *khilāfa*, "succession") began with Abu Bakr (573-634), a close companion of the Prophet and one of the first converts. Twenty-five years after the original dispute, Ali became the fourth caliph. But in 661, after Ali's martyrdom, tensions continued. Shi'as believe that the line of leadership continued with the sons of Ali (Hasan and Hussain), who both are considered the Prophet's direct progeny. However, the descendants of the third caliph, Othman (Ar. 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān; 577-656) were hostile to this. In 680, Ali's son Hossain (Al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib; 626-680) and all his male family members and friends were massacred in Karbala (present day Iraq) by the army of Yazid (647-683), the second caliph of the Umayyad Caliphate. He and his seventy-two companions were beheaded, and their bodies cut into pieces. His female family members and the children became captives. Ever since, Shi'as

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<sup>91</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, in this thesis I will retain the Common Era (CE) designation and the Gregorian calendar associated to it.

<sup>92</sup> In Arabic language, Shi'a can be used in its general sense but also to indicate Shiites, the "party" of Ali. "The word *shi'a* (pl. *shiya'* or *ashya'*) and other derivative forms from the root word *sh-y-* appear in the Qur'an and the hadith literature with varied meanings and significations. Over time, it acquired a technical meaning in historical and sectarian works: those who supported Ali and believe that the Prophet had explicitly designated him as his temporal and spiritual successor. Its lexical meaning, namely, 'group, party, sect, or faction,' is evident in several Qur'anic verses, all but one or two of which have a negative connotation: 'As for those who have divided their religion and broken up into factions [*shiya'*- plural of *shi'a*], have nothing to do with them [O Prophet]' (Q.6: 159), 'We will seize out of each group [*shi'a*] those who were most disobedient toward the Lord of Mercy' (Q. 19:69), 'We sent messengers among the various communities [*shiya'*] of old, but they mocked every single messenger that came to them' (Q. 15:10); and 'Pharaoh made himself high and mighty in the land and divided the people into different groups [*shiya'*]' (Q. 28:4). This term is also used in the sense of a partisan, follower, or supporter in: 'and of his partisans [*shi'ati-hi*] was Abraham' (Q. 37:83)" (Mavani, 2013, p. 35).

<sup>93</sup> "The *Shi'is* interpret this word as explicit evidence of Ali's official designation as the prophet's successor in both the political and religious spheres, and even more so, as Muhammad was commanded, according to the Shi'is, to designate him by Q. 5: 67" (Mavani, 2013, p. 2).

<sup>94</sup> There are a number of *ahadith* to prove the event of Ghadir-e Khom. For example, "*Hadith Yawm ad-Dar* (day of the prophet's invitation to his kinsmen); *Hadith Manzilah* (The Prophet's designation of Ali as his deputy in Medina during the Tabuk expedition); *Ayat al-Wilayah* (Ali's offering of a ring to a beggar and the subsequent revelation of a pertinent verse); Event of Ghadir Khumm; and *Hadith ath-Thaqalayn*. See *Tafsir kabir*, vol. 12, pp. 28,53 under *Sureh al-Ma'idah*, verses 55,67; *Sirah ibn-Hisham*, vol. 4, p. 520; *Tarikh Tabari*, vol.2, pp. 319,322; *Al-Ghadir*, vols, 1-3; *Califate of Imam Ali*" (Algar in Khomeini, 1970, p. 15). "O Apostle! Deliver what has been revealed to you from your Lord; and if you do it not, then you have not delivered His message and Allah will protect you from the people, surely Allah will not guide the unbelieving people" (5:67). The most famous *hadith* regarding the event of Ghadir is in *Tafsir Kabir* which explains the history; After finishing the hajj, the prophet took Ali's hand and said: "whoever whose *mawla* (master) I am, Ali is his master. O Allah love him who loves Ali and be the enemy of the enemy of Ali ; help him who helps Ali and forsake him who forsakes Ali" See *A Brief History of the Fourteen Infallibles* (Tehran, Iran: WOFIS).

mourn the event as the essence of injustice, the victory of the oppressors over the righteous, of the strong over the weak, of the corrupt over the pious. The Caliph Yazid has become the archetype of all worldly wickedness, and Hossain the model for heroic self-sacrifice. Karbala gained the status of holy city for Shi'a Muslims, along with Najaf (present day Iraq, the tomb of Ali). "It is asserted that the proclivity or tendency toward the Shi'i world view and the definitive schism became crystallised only after the massacre of Hossain, [...], an event that serves as a catalyst in the formulation of a unique Shi'i identity" (Mavani, 2013, p. 33).

Twelve Imami Shi'a Muslims believe that the leadership of the *umat-e Islami* after the martyrdom of Imam Ali have been passed upon twelve Imams.<sup>95</sup> The last Imam has been in Occultation (*ghaybah*) since 874 CE.<sup>96</sup> The concept of *Imamat* in Shi'ism is key. Having been appointed by Allah by means of an uninterrupted chain that goes back to the Prophet Muhammad, the Imams do not merely possess political authority. They belong to the highest level of piety among believers:

*Imamate* is instituted by divine installation (*nasb*); only Allah truly knows who possesses the qualities required to fulfil this duty, therefore only He is capable of appointing them. Shi'a considers Imamate, like Prophethood, to be a fundamental belief, and obedience to the authority of their Imam a religious obligation (Vaezi, 2004, p. 56).

There are also several *ayat* in the Qur'an that apparently talk about the *Imamat*, the religious and political leadership of the *umat-e Islami*. Shi'as believe that the twelve Imams, Ali and his male progeny, are the rightful successor of the Prophet. They possess a high level of divine knowledge and are infallible (*ma'sum*), just like the Prophet. As direct descendants of the Prophet, children of Fatemeh and Ali are members of *Ahlulbayt*, the family of Mohammad. According to Shi'as, the twelve Imams are the only source of commentary and interpretation of the Qur'an.<sup>97</sup> The term *vali* (guardian) is also a crucial one: "Allah is the guardian of those who believe" (2: 257). According to Vaezi,

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<sup>95</sup> "In Imami theological circles the members of the Household of the Holy Prophet (pbuh) are referred to as The Fourteen Infallibles. Namely, the Prophet (pbuh) himself, his daughter Fatima (as), his son-in-law Ali (as), then his grandson Hassan (as), and Hussein (as) and the nine descendants from Hussein (as): Ali b. Hussein (as), Muhammad b. Ali (as), Ja'far b. Muhammad (as), Musa b. Ja'far (as), Ali b. Musa (as), Muhammad b. Ali (as), Ali b. Muhammad (as), Hassan b. Ali (as), and the twelfth Imam known as al-Mahdi (ajfs)" (Nakshawani, 2014, p. 13).

<sup>96</sup> The Twelfth Imam of Shi'as was born in 869 CE. "Four years later, after the death of his father Al-Askari, the Eleventh Imam, he was hidden from the authorities of the Abbasid caliphs as a precaution. His whereabouts were disclosed only to a very few of his followers. Four of his father's close associates became successive mediators between the Imam and his followers until the year 941. This period has been considered by the Imamites as the first or the short occultation (*Soghra*) of the twelfth Imam" (Hossain, 1982, p. 9). "At the death of the four deputies no successor was named, and the Greater Occultation (*ghaybat-i kobrah*) began and continues to this day" (Algar in Khomeini, 1970, p. 19). See also *Expectation of the Millennium: Shi'ism in history* by Nasr, S. H., Dabashi, H., & Nasr, A. V. R., (1989).

<sup>97</sup> The word *Imam* means 'leader', one who is followed by a group: "One day we shall call every group of people by their respective Imams" (17: 71). The title Imam, however, does not necessarily have a

When the term *velayat* is attributed to the *Imams*, it carries the implications of “mastership”, “sovereignty” and “lordship”. This is to indicate the authority of the *Imam* over the believers, who are subject to his guardianship. *Imami* theologians refer to the Qur’an (e.g. 5: 55) and the prophetic traditions to support the exclusive authority (*velayat*) of the Imams (Vaezi, 2004, p. 58).

The central axis of *Ethna-ashari* Shi’a (twelve Imami political thought), as well as other Islamic schools of thought, is to believe in the absolute authority of Allah and his laws. The Prophet and the Twelve Imams are subject to divine appointment by God.<sup>98</sup> In the absence of the twelfth guide, Imam Al-Mahdi, the Twelver Shi’a adopt a system of vicegerency. The religious and political authority of the *umat-e Islami* is entrusted to all *olama* in their entirety (as expressed in the notion of *al-niyaba al-‘amma*) – who are pious, just, capable and knowledgeable to continue the lines of *Imams*. The most knowledgeable jurist is called *vali-faqih*, a scholar of *shari’ah* (jurisprudence). Therefore, *velayat-e faqih* refers to the authority of a *faqih* in the absence of the hidden Imam. In fact, Khomeini’s idea of *velayat-e faqih* is not new in Shi’a *fiqh*, but he significantly expanded the scope of *velayat-e faqih* in a direction not envisioned before. One needs to acknowledge that in spite of the opposition of some *olama*, many others have expressed favourable opinions. Among them, for example, Ayatollah Ahmad Naraqi (1829) holds similar views to Khomeini about the importance of *olama* in holding political power. He, (although had a very different understanding of the extent of the guardianship rights), tried to collect evidence from Shi’a *ahadith* and to prove that the guardianship rights were entrusted to the most knowledgeable and just jurist at the time of the Great Occultation.<sup>99</sup> After Ayatollah Naraqi, Khomeini put much emphasis on guardianship of the *faqih*. His first reason for examining this issue from a political point of view was the manipulation and misinterpretation of Islam in the modern world by orientalist and imperialists. He, in this manner, denounced views that represent Islam as incapable to govern the society “at the age of industrial civilization” or suggesting that “legal provisions of Islam are inadequate to resolve the social problems, and to provide us with appropriate answers” (Khomeini, 1970, p. 4). Admittedly, Khomeini believed the imperialistic powers were trying to distort Islamic principles to achieve their own desires. In Ayatollah Khomeini’s view, Islam

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moral implication: “And we made them (but) Imams inviting to the fire; and on the Day of Judgment no help shall they find. In this world we continued to curse them; and on the Day of Judgment they will be among the hateful” (28: 41-42). The Qur’an has also mentioned those types of Imams who are appointed by Allah himself. “And we assigned from among them some Imams who guide by our authority since they were patient and believed firmly in our signs” (32:24). The word ‘*Imam*’ can be used as ‘*vali*’. *Vali* or *velayat* has several meanings such as “friend, supporter, devoted or protector” (Vaezi, 2004, p. 57).

<sup>98</sup> “Only God is your *vali* and his Apostle and those who believe. Who perform prayer and pay alms while they bow” (5:55).

<sup>99</sup> “In all instances, where the Prophet and the infallible Imams (a) had been authorised and assigned as guardians except in cases, where this had been excluded due to religiosity legal requirement. In all instances, related to religious and living duties of people that must be carried out” (Khomeini, 1970, p. 4).



is the religion of anti-imperialism. The nature of Islam is based on freedom and independence, but imperialists, with various colonial measures (economic, cultural, etc.) are trying to control Muslim countries and exploit their resources. Orientalist views of Islam present Muslims as a homogeneous community blindly adopting few ritual norms (e.g. prayer) and concerned with gender segregation (e.g. the *hejab*). According to Khomeini, separation of Islam from politics is promoted by enemies of Islam to alienate Muslims from Islam and their own destiny (Khomeini, 1970, p. 5). With reference to *ahadith* and ordinances of Islam, just in a very few cases there is emphasis on individual duties of Muslims in front of their creator. These individual aspects of Islam have very little to do with the salvation of the nation. Since the political and social aspects of Islam determine the destiny of the nation, Khomeini's idea of *hokumat-e eslami* is especially targeted at the faulty notion of separation of religion and politics. As mentioned in the introduction, it is clear that, Khomeini's view is in sharp contrast to Satrapi's individuality and the way she considers religion as a personal affair and promotes separation of religion from politics consequently.

In Khomeini's school of thought, faith and morality are true solutions to social problems and human miseries. Wealth and affluence alone cannot be applied in a society devoid of morality and spirituality. Islamic laws are to regulate the life of men and women in the modern world, and to provide eternal salvation. To this end, and to guarantee the application of Islamic laws in the labyrinth of society, a specific form of government is needed. In Shi'a Twelve Imami School, the Islamic community has never been abandoned without a qualified leader. The Prophet of Islam, before his death, designated Imam Ali to expound, legislate and enforce the Islamic laws. And so did his descendants. Therefore, there is no era in Islamic history that the *umat* has been lived without a leader (and the Islamic system of governance). In Khomeini's political doctrine, all the affairs of a Muslim community must be in conformity with laws appointed by God, and a faithful leader with executive governmental institutions is needed. At the time of the Greater Occultation, in order for the Islamic ordinances to be fixed and not transformed or distorted or deformed, the existence of a powerful executive authority is important. As Khomeini puts it: "The Sacred Legislator of Islam is the sole legislative power. No one has the right to legislate and no law may be executed except the law of the Divine Legislator" (Khomeini, 1970, p. 29). It is incumbent on every Muslim to obey the laws. Muslims in an Islamic society are not just abiding by the social rules. They are performing their duty in front of God. The vicegerent of Allah does not have any duty but implementing the rules of God, and supervision over the correct implementation of them. The leader should be knowledgeable; not only with knowledge of religious matters, but also with knowledge of

jurisprudence and politics.<sup>100</sup> In this regard, the *foqaha*<sup>101</sup> are preferred to other *olama* or religious scholars. Khomeini believes the *faqih* has responsibility for the guardianship of the *umat-e Islami*, and keeping the unity of Islamic society falls within his responsibilities. Everything which is threatening the solidarity of this unique community must be annihilated.<sup>102</sup> Naturally, there will be legal restraints and limitations in rules' application that are defined by the government within the Islamic framework.

There are some important issues that should not be neglected. First of all, the *vali-ye faqih*, regardless of his highest religious qualities, is not *ma'sum*. He is subject to making mistakes. Therefore, he is not necessarily chosen directly by the Hidden Imam.<sup>103</sup> The highest political leadership, *vali-ye faqih*, is chosen through elections. Many Shi'a scholars believe *velayat-e faqih* is that the authority of *vali* leaves no space for the authority of people as in liberal democracy (e.g. the accusation of dictatorship by Satrapi against the Iranian officials). The authority of people in the Islamic government is accomplished through *shura* (consultation). The word '*shura*' in Arabic means to consult or to ask for advice. The etymology of the Arabic word is *shar ul-asal* which literally means to extract honey from the hive. This implies that the person who is consulting others can get the best result at the end (Ghorshi, 1994, vol. 4, p. 88). In the Qur'an, *shura* is used with the same meaning. The Prophet of Islam and all the believers are recommended to consult each other on social and political affairs. For example in *sureh Al-e-Imran*, verse 159, it says: "and take counsel with them in the affair; so when you have decided, then place your trust in Allah; surely Allah loves those who trust" (3:159). From this *ayeh*, one can understand that *shura* has base in Islam - Islamic leaders have to consult other Muslims, by means of elected representatives, in administering the *umat*'s affairs. This *ayeh* was revealed in Medina after the formation of the Islamic state by the Prophet, and that is why it is said that consultation should be performed within the Islamic government (Ostadi, 1981, p. 7). From these textual references, public participation is known as significant and basic in Islamic government. Without considering the authority of

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<sup>100</sup> According to Imam Ali, only the most knowledgeable person has the right to rule the *umat-e Islami*: "O men! The most qualified among men for the caliphate is he who is most capable and knowledgeable of Allah's commands" (Imam Ali in *Nahj al-balaqah*, Sermon. 172).

<sup>101</sup> In another *hadith*, the Imam mentioned to the role of *foqaha* in the society as a fortress: "Believers who are *foqaha* are the fortresses of Islam" (Rizvi, 1978, vol. 1, p. 38). The meaning of this statement is that the *foqaha* "were the guardians of Islam, protecting its beliefs, ordinances and institutions in the most comprehensive manner" (Khomeini, 1970, p. 43).

<sup>102</sup> For example, adultery can cause corruption and loosen the ties of family life as the primary base of the society. Therefore, penal provisions need to be implemented to establish the Islamic order in the society. In this case, prohibition of adultery is more important than praying and fasting. The former is a social problem while the latter is an individual one. It is a Muslim's duty to protect and preserve Islam.

<sup>103</sup> "The quality of *ismat* (divinely bestowed freedom from error and sin) only appertains to the prophet, his daughter and the twelve Imams" (Algar in Khomeini, 1970, p. 36). "It is worthy to mention that infallibility is an inseparable trait of those who propagate divine laws; yet, because infallibility is a prerequisite for prophets and Imams in their roles of propagating divine rules, it does not mean that others, who also propagate, are safeguarded from sins" (Amini & Qazvini, 1992, p. 79).

people, the Islamic government is not legitimised. Rashid al-Ghannouchi (b. 1941) in *Participation in Non-Islamic Government in Liberal Islam* defines the Islamic government as follows:

The Islamic government is one in which: 1- supreme legislative authority is for the *shari'a*, which is the revealed law of Islam, which transcends all laws. Within this context, it is responsibility of scholars to deduce detailed laws and regulations to be used as guidelines by judges. The head of the Islamic state is the leader of the executive body entrusted with the responsibility of implementing such laws and regulations. 2-political power belongs to the community (*ummah*), which should adopt a form of 'shura' which is a system of mandatory consultation (1998, p. 91).

As Ghannouchi states, participation in the political affairs of the Islamic government is a duty for all Muslims. Isolation and separation from politics has nothing to do with the Islamic *shari'ah* laws. It is incumbent on the *vali* to consult, and it is a responsibility shouldered by the public to take part in the state's affairs. It is only through *shura* that the idea of dictatorship is prevented in the *omat*. This process of "power-sharing" can achieve many aims, such as: "development, social solidarity, civil liberties, human rights, political pluralism, independence of the judiciary, freedom of the press, or liberty for mosques or Islamic activities" (1998, p. 92). Sadek Sulaiman (b. 1933) also compares the *shura* with basic elements of democracy. "*Shura* in Islam does not differ from democracy. Both *shura* and democracy arise from the central consideration that collective deliberation is more likely to lead to a fair and sound result for the social good than individual preference" (Sulaiman as cited in Vaezi, 2004, p. 174). Manifestation of *shura* in the Iranian political system is defined through the Parliament, Guardian Council and the Assembly of Experts. The pro-Khomeinis, for example, state that *velayat-e faqih* does not deny the role of other *foqaha*, who are almost at the same level as the *vali-ye faqih*. They believe there is a democratic process for the *vali* to be chosen, i.e. through a body of elected *foqaha* who have been previously chosen by people. This group of *foqaha* is called the *Majles-e Khobregan* (Assembly of Experts).<sup>104</sup> This group of jurists will supervise and control the *faqih*'s usage of power and authority. Therefore, he is not free of popular control to follow his own interests or abuse his authority.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> "The Assembly of Experts is a clerical council responsible for electing the Supreme Leader of Iran. Though members are elected by popular vote, all candidates are subject to disqualification by the Council of Guardians...The Assembly of Experts convenes every six months to review the activities of the Supreme Leader in power and decide whether to further extend his term" (Alexander and Hoenig, 2008, p. 18).

<sup>105</sup> The scope of the *vali*'s authority is supervised and controlled by a group of jurists. Ayatollah Khomeini in his *Saheefeye Noor* said: "I do not want to impose (my will) on my people, and Islam does not permit us to establish a dictatorship. We follow our nation's votes and act according to their views. We have no right, God has not conferred such a right to us, and the Prophet (pbuh) never permitted us to impose our ideas upon Muslims" (Khomeini, 1982, vol. 10, p. 181).

### *Velayat-e faqih and its critics*

In theoretic analysis of *velayat-e faqih*, the critics could be categorised as follows. In the first place, some critical views compare Khomeini's political thought with liberal democracy only, and conclude its incompatibility. This view denies the general base of religious democracy. Another category is those critics who consider *velayat-e faqih* from a religious point of view. This group refers to the evidences and reasons used to prove and establish *velayat-e faqih* and, hence rejects the religious base of it. Among this group, Mohsen Kadivar<sup>106</sup> can be named. Kadivar as an Islamic reformist distinguishes between historical and real Islam. According to him, historical Islam includes elements of autocracy while 'real' Islam mandates democratic features. Being partly based on the historical notions of Islam, Kadivar believes that Khomeini's *velayat-e faqih* is not compatible with democracy. In discussing the relationship between *velayat-e faqih* and democracy, Kadivar states that it is necessary to differentiate firstly between Islamic republicanism and *velayat-e faqih*. The former, it is argued, is a form and method of governance that can lead to or give rise to the latter. Therefore, the two concepts are not the same. What is currently running in Iran is an amalgamation of these two which means that all the organs of the government are performing their duties under the supervision of an appointed and full-fledged authorised *vali-ye faqih*. Secondly, based on the presumption that Islam is not incompatible with democracy. Kadivar states *velayat-e faqih* and Islam as a religion and system of beliefs are different. The implementation of *velayat-e faqih* as a system of governance does not have a base in Islamic jurisprudence according to Kadivar. In his opinion, Islam in itself does not contradict with democracy, rather if *velayat-e faqih* becomes the system of governance, then definitely, Islam is incompatible with democracy. Kadivar rejects the base of *velayat-e faqih* as lacking the proper Islamic foundation, while many other critics have disputed the scope of authority of the *faqih*. Most Shi'i *maraje'* agreed on the deputyship of the Hidden Imam by *foqaha*. This deputyship is either *motlaq* (absolute) or *nesbi* (proportional). Those who believe in absolute authority of the *faqih*, give credence to the *faqih's* authority in almost all areas attributable to the infallible Imams i.e. Naraqi, Khomeini and his followers. Others, however, consider limited political or social responsibility for the *faqih*. "Many Shi'ite clerics remained apolitical because they viewed politics as a profane and secular activity in conflict with their profession

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<sup>106</sup> Mohsen Kadivar is a "philosopher, theologian, an Iranian dissident who has been in exile since 2008, and research professor of Islamic studies at Duke University (Durham, North Carolina, US). Born in 1959, he studied at the Islamic seminary at Qom earning a certificate of *ijtihad* (highest degree in Islamic religious tradition). He received his PhD in Islamic Philosophy and Theology from Tarbiat Modares University in Tehran. Specializing in classical Islam and contemporary Islamic thought, his main intellectual interests and topics of publications include: classical Muslim philosophy, classical and modern Shi'a theology and legal theories, human rights and democracy in Islam, and political theology in post-revolutionary Iran" (En.kadivar.com, 2011).

and mission in life” (Semati, 2008, p. 208). Therefore, *velayat-e faqih* cannot be accepted as the only authoritative model.<sup>107</sup>

The meaning of guardianship is literally different from solely representing the public. Guardianship or *velayat* receives detailed treatment for the critics of *velayat-e faqih*. The 19<sup>th</sup> century scholar, Sheikh Morteza Ansari (1781-1864) developed the theory of *velayat-e faqih* but did not extend the guardianship of the *faqih* to political leadership (Sachedina, 1988, pp. 218-229). According to Ansari (19<sup>th</sup> century scholar who is not directly responding to Khomeini), the discretionary authority of the *faqih* to possess the properties of the people and to manage the public and political affairs of the Muslims, in the same way as the Prophet and the Imams, is not proved within Islamic references. Ansari stated that such a right cannot exist for anyone. “The Qur’an states that the Prophet has more right (*awla*) over believers than they have over themselves (33: 6)” (Sachedina, 1988, p. 215). This form of *velayat* is invested in the infallibles only, according to Ansari and with reference to Islamic sources.

The most heated debate on the *velayat-e faqih* among *foqaha* revolves around the extent of the authority of *vali*, the fully competent jurist. For example, Abol-Qasem Khoei (1899-1992), an influential *marja*’, “rejected Khomeini’s arguments on the basis that he had exaggerated the significance in *faqih* of the concept of *velayat*, which (according to Khoei) was properly confined to the guardianship of widows and orphans” (Axworthy, 2013, p. 140). After Khoei, one of his most prominent students who is considered as his successor also, Ayatollah Seyed Ali Hosseini Sistani in Najaf, continued to reject Khomeini’s school of *velayat-e faqih*. Ayatollah Sistani believes that “if a *faqih* (jurisconsult) wants to possess *wilaya* in the state’s administration, he must secure the people’s general approval (*maqbuliyya ‘amma*)” (Mavani, 2013, p. 197). According to Sistani, Khomeini was in a higher religious position than Khamenei (the current *vali-ye faqih*). He was qualified for being a *marja*’ for Shi’as while the latter is not ranked among sources of emulation. Sistani’s views have been challenged by some contemporary *olama* in Iran. They argue that every single Shi’a including the *maraj-e taqlid* must obey the *vali-ye faqih*. Among the pro-government jurists, Ayatollah Muhammad Taqi Mebah Yazdi, the director of the research institute of Imam Khomeini, strongly believes that the supreme *faqih* is the Imam’s deputy and should be viewed as him, namely infallible. According to Mesbah Yazdi, the public approval is not needed to verify the

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<sup>107</sup> “Other paradigms exist, such as those presented by Ayatollahs Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr (d.1980), Muhammad Hossain Fadlallah (d. 2010), Hosein Ali Montazeri (d. 2010), Salehi Najafabadi (d. 2006), Muhammad Mahdi Shamsuddin (d. 2001), Mehdi Haeri Yazdi (d. 1999), Mohsen Kadivar, Muhammad Mojtahed Shabestani, Muhaqqiq Damad, Dr. Abdolkarim Soroush, and other eminent Shi’i jurists and scholars. All of them merit serious consideration due to their nuanced understanding of the range of opinions on this issue and for playing a pioneering role in proposing different political paradigms which constitute an integral part of the Shi’i political thought” (Mavani, 2013, p. xi).

validation of Imam's post. The deputy of Imam is not presented to the public to attain their endorsement. The *faqih* receives his legitimacy from God through the messianic Imam. Obeying his authority is an unconditional duty.<sup>108</sup> This point of view opposes the general meaning of democracy which includes elections by people. According to Kadivar, in such a system the instalment or dismissal of the *vali-ye faqih* is a divine act and therefore beyond the capacity of the general public. Also, in this situation, the supreme leader is not counted for his actions as he is only accountable in front of God. This absolute authority is contradictory to the notions of democracy. On this basis, it can be argued that there is no distribution of power in the political system of Khomeini and decisions that affect the society do not necessarily gather consensus. According to Schmitter and Karl, "democracy is in jeopardy of military officers, entrenched civil servants, or state managers retain the capacity to act independently of elected civilians or even veto decisions made by the people's representatives" (2009, p. 9). It so appears that in the system of *velayat-e faqih*, the legitimacy of almost all public decisions is depending upon the decision and views of the supreme leader.

Among the critics of Khomeini, Hossein Ali Montazeri's<sup>109</sup> interpretation of the Shi'i scholarship is quite different. Montazeri believes that the Islamic ruler should have the public support and endorsement in a form of a social contract. "The end result is something called the 'electoral and limited guardianship of the jurist' (*velayat-e entekhabi-ye moqayyade-ye faqih*)" (Mavani, 2013, p. 154). In this model, he used verses of the Qur'an and different *ahadith* to justify the validity of *velayat-e faqih* and asserted that the jurisconsult is not only chosen by the people "but rather selected on account of his proficiency and expertise in temporal and religious matters" (Mavani, 2013, p. 154). Based on this view, the jurisconsult's legitimacy is originating from the holy sources, however, it is necessary for the jurist to have the support and endorsement of the people. In his post-revolution writings, Montazeri "expanded the jurist's scope of power and eliminated the plurality of authority in government. He accomplished this by invoking the principle of public allegiance to thwart any dissent or disagreement by the other jurists" (Mavani, 2013, p. 155). At the time of Khomeini, Montazeri

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<sup>108</sup> Mohsen Kadivar summarises the *faqih*'s domain of power: "The citizenry—having been placed in care of the supreme leader—has no say in the appointment or dismissal of the *waliy al-amr*, and no authority to oversee his conduct of *wilayat*, or his personal conduct (that of the *waliy al-amr*, or supreme leader). Opinion of the supreme leader constitutes the measure of proper decisions regarding public domain. It is expected of the public to conform to, and coordinate with the views of the supreme leader—not the other way around. All public domain functions derive their legitimacy through their attribution to the supreme leader. The most important religious duty of the people toward the supreme leader is to accept his verdicts, obey his edicts and help him succeed. *Wilayat* is obligatory—not elective. It is permanent, and life-long—not transitory. And it is binding on all human beings, without any exception or condition" (Kadivar, 2011).

<sup>109</sup> Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri (1922- 2009) was a Shi'a theologian who was critical of the Iranian domestic and foreign policies. He was a leading critique of *velayat-e faqih* and dissident to Ahmadinejad.

lost his status for expressing his disagreement on administrating the state affairs. Later on, he rebuked Ayatollah Khamene'i on his scholarly position and mentioned his junior position in comparison to Khomeini. He also called upon a number of other jurists to speak out against the injustices of the state. Emphasising the idea of people's participation in confirming the status of *vali-ye faqih*, Montazeri made the case of Imam Ali who sought public allegiance to question the full-fledged authority of the *faqih* advocated by Khomeini. In other words, what mostly concerned Montazeri, was the election process of *vali-ye faqih* which lacks the popular sovereignty. This concern has been analysed by conservative arguments of *velayat-e faqih* by Vaezi with precision and astuteness under the rubric public sovereignty and *shura* in Islamic state.<sup>110</sup> Montazeri's concerns has been shared by other scholars such as Mohsen Kadivar or lesser known one such as Mohammad Mehdi Shamsuddin, Mehdi Haeri Yazdi or Abdolkarim Soroush.

Embedded in the complex multi-confessional context of Lebanon, Shamsuddin rejects Khomeini's concept of the guardianship of the jurisconsult (*wilāyat al-faqīh*) and develops the notion of *wilāyat al-umma 'alā nafsīha* (the guardianship of the people over themselves): in the time of the occultation of the Imam, authority and sovereignty rest with the people and not with the jurisconsult as deputy of the Imam. (Scharbrodt, 2014, pp. 381-82)

Quite similar to Shamsuddin, Haeri Yazdi and Kadivar who were both trained in "Western" universities and Islamic seminaries, approached the issue of governance not only from a jurisprudential (*fiqhi*) but from a philosophical and historical perspective. According to Haeri, administrating the state's affairs "falls under the rubric of practical and universal intelligence, wisdom, and experience, and, as such, has no relationship with one's mastery of jurisprudence" (Mavani, 2013, p. 169). "Haeri Yazdi argues that the political roles and offices the Prophet and Imams assumed, were subject to public endorsement and 'not linked to their primary mission, but rather coincidental'" (Scharbrodt, 2014, p. 382).

Almost all of these scholars argued the public role in government structure through election and consultation. Praising certain characteristics of democratic principles, the above mentioned scholars believe that there is space for democracy in Islam, however, the *velayat-e faqih* as applied currently in Iran does not sanction democracy. According to Marineau, "many contemporary thinkers in Iran are attempting to reconcile a religious-informed vision of government with the modern forms of democracy, rather than simply eschewing the former

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<sup>110</sup> "According to article 107, a group of elected experts (a few jurists are elected by people every seven years) shall elect a well-qualified *faqih* as the political leader. Both the authority of *shari'ah* (*velayat-e faqih*) and the sovereignty of the people in this political regime make it a mixture of democracy and guardianship. Hence it should be categorised as a 'meritocracy', because it does not go hand in hand with all the standards of guardianship. What distinguishes this model of 'meritocracy' from guardianship is the role of the people in participating in the distribution of political power and in shaping political decisions through their representatives" (Vaezi, 2004, p. 131).

for the latter” (n.d., p. 93). “Since its inception in 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been the stage for continuous struggle over defining the legal limits and boundaries of freedom, and its Islamic justification” (Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2000, p. 34). Being governed under the Islamic principles for more than 30 years, Mehran Kamrava claims that Iran “is in the midst of a silent revolution of ideas, which is occurring at a unique juncture in Iran’s history” (2008, p. 7).

All Shi’i *olama* in their entirety exercise collective deputyship (*al-niyaba al-‘amma*) of the Imam in Occultation. However, what most of them disagree with is the scope of this authority. Opposite to the comprehensive authority advocated by Khomeini, *hisbiyya* affairs are considered as the domain of power for the deputy of Imam. This includes “issuing legal opinions on juridical issues, implementing the penal code (*hudud*) and discretionary penalties (*ta‘zir*), inviting people to righteousness and discouraging them from committing abominable acts, instituting congregational prayers (especially the Friday prayer), supervising endowments and collecting religious dues” (Mavani, 2013, p. 14). Furthermore, limited authority over the unclaimed properties and orphans and endowments also fall within *faqih*’s responsibility. This limited authority has been critically interrogated by Khomeini. He thus considered a more in-depth role for the jurisconsult for the leadership of the public at the time of Occultation. In short, Khomeini’s definition of the authority of *faqih* is “an extension of that enjoyed by the infallible Imams” (Mavani, 2013, p. 180).<sup>111</sup> With this proclamation, governmental ordinances are given priority to other religious injunctions. According to Khomeini, the government “is part of the absolute deputyship of the Prophet, is one of the primary injunctions of Islam and has priority over all other secondary injunctions, even prayers, fasting and *hajj*” (Khomeini, 1981, pp. 82-3). Therefore, it is a divine duty to preserve the Islamic government and its non-performance is considered as a sin. Based on Khomeini’s interpretation of divine duties for citizens, Satrapi’s banishment from her country -after publishing her work which was read as anti-Iranian by the Islamic Republic- is explicated. Satrapi’s work can be compared to *Satanic Verses* (1988) by Salman Rushdie. Accusation of *Islam setizi*, setting a battle against Islam, is similar to Rushdie’s case. Satrapi and Rushdie’s case is similar and different. They were received differently around the world. Some believe the ruling was against freedom of speech, whereas some agree with Khomeini that Rushdie’s work was an insult to the Prophet, the Qur’an and all *umat-e Islami*. According to Iranian officials, the command of apostasy, *hokm-e irtedad*, is a political order in Islam. This means

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<sup>111</sup> According to Khomeini, “God has conferred upon government in the present age the same powers and authority that were held by the Most Noble Messenger and the Imams with respect to equipping and mobilizing armies, appointing governors and officials, and levying taxes and expending them for the welfare of the Muslims” (as cited in Mavani, 2013, p. 181).



that the apostate starts a battle purposefully against Islam. As Rafsanjani<sup>112</sup>, the former president of Iran (1989-1997) said, Rushdie's insult against the Prophet of Islam and the Qur'an was "not an action by an individual or something stemming from taste, but a collective and extensive effort to instigate a cultural confrontation with Islam" (Pipes, 2009, p. 128). Quite similar to accusations of orientalism against *Persepolis*, an Iranian newspaper said about the *Satanic Verses* that it was "an attempt to spread a false picture of Islam in order to restrict the spread of Islam" (Pipes, 2009, p. 129). As Pipes reports from Iranian officials, "the book and its publishers were only a link in the chain of the new anti-Islamic cultural ploys" (2009, p. 129). According to Orientalist critics, it can be argued about *Persepolis*, that Satrapi's attempt in envisaging her love towards her country is a way of denigrating Islam and the Islamic culture of Iran by comparing the compulsory dress code, lack of individuality, gender inequality and inability with the "Western" cultural norms and values. The critics and Iranian officials, of course, have warned us with the orientalist discourse inherent in Satrapi's critique despite her *intentio auctoris*.

### **Democracy and Islam: a disarticulation?**

In what follows, the argument deploys a double investigation of the genealogy of the idea of democracy in general and the manner in which it has functioned and been understood in post-revolutionary Iran. This will serve two purposes in developing the argument. First, and minimally, is investigating Satrapi's concerns over the term 'democracy' as "illusion" in both the Islamic Republic and the "West". In doing so, some demonstrable understanding of the roots of democracy is necessary. Second, it is essential that a discussion be mounted regarding the relationship between human rights and democracy within the Iranian context. This is to consider Satrapi's position as a liberal and progressive figure in promoting individuality in the religious communal system of Iran.

As discussed earlier, one should differentiate between the concept of Islam and the Islamic world. According to Wilfred Cantwell, Islam in itself does not exist. "In a sense this is obvious. There is indeed nothing called 'Islam' which can speak for itself; there are only 'Muslims', practitioners of Islam, who attempt to speak for it" (Cantwell as cited in Goddard, 2002, p. 4). On the same basis, there is nothing that can be called 'democracy'. It is, rather, the ideas and opinions of different theorists and practitioners that give meaning to democracy.

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<sup>112</sup> Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (b. 1934) was the fourth Iranian president, in office from 1989 to 1997. He announced his candidacy for the 2013 election but was disqualified by the Guardian Council. He is accused of supporting the Green Movement (Mohammadi, 2013). Seyyed Mohammad Khatami (b. 1943) was the fifth president of Iran from 1997 to 2005. He was famous for his reformist politics and Dialogue Among Civilizations. He announced that he would be a candidate for the 2009 election but withdrew from the race in favour of Mousavi. He is also accused of supporting the Green Movement (BBC News, 2009).

In many parts of the world, when democracy is posed, the issues of individual autonomy and human rights are coming to mind. In many “Western” European countries or in the United States of America, there is no such a thing as total submission to the wills of the government. There is a strong relationship between democracy and individual liberty. The natural or basic human rights are well protected in “Western” cultural heritage. Outside this circle and especially in societies where religion plays a significant role, there is no such a thing as individual liberty in the way it is defined in a “Western” context. Therefore, it would be wrong to consider democracy or human rights as promoting individuality or as universal values.

Amartya Sen believes “a country does not have to be deemed fit *for* democracy; rather, it has to become fit *through* democracy” (Sen as cited in Diamond & Plattner, 2009, p. xxvii). Apparently, there are some considerations which would merit democracy as a universal value<sup>113</sup>. For example, democracy “has *instrumental* value in enabling people to express their needs and claims. And democracy has ‘*constructive* importance’ in helping society ‘to form its values and priorities’” (Diamond & Plattner, 2009, p. xxvii). However, assuming that there should be an agreement on the essence of democracy at a global level, is wrong. The phenomenon of multiculturalism in postmodern societies makes it difficult for democracy to have a fixed universal foundation. The claim that the values of democracy are universal arises from the fact that “the Western liberal democracies have been so effective in exporting-or imposing- their own values” (Blaug and Schwarzmantel, 2001, p. 3). Looking at democracy as a product of a particular civilisation with no validity for other cultures creates scepticism when encountering the debate over cultural relativism. The genealogy of the word ‘democracy’ suggests respecting differences and maximising the interactions. No universally fixed values are recognisable in relations with democracy. The political conflicts within a democracy are inevitable. Based on the preference of collective or individual needs, democracies can be ranged from liberal to social. Circumscribing or extending the public realm are two extremes of this spectrum. Both cases are considered as democratic but differently. If it carries to one side, it can destroy the legitimate authority. Based on this idea, there are many different types of democracy with various effects. The case of the Islamic Republic in Iran with its social orientations can still be considered in the range of democracies although, this might not be in line with Satrapi’s more liberal orientations in the structure of democracy. The complex nature of democracy, quite opposite to Satrapi’s views, suggests that it is impossible

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<sup>113</sup> Notwithstanding the problems that democracies have in establishing themselves as universal, they are sharing some general characteristic. Schmitter and Karl state that, “what distinguishes democratic rules from non-democratic ones are the norms that condition how the former come to power and the practices that hold them accountable for their actions” (Schmitter and Karl, 2009, p. 5). Sen states that “democracy has a universal role to play in preventing the abuse of power, and in helping people to formulate and understand their own needs, rights and duties” (Sen as cited in Blaug and Schwarzmantel, 2001, p. 5).

to create universal ideals and that this complexity needs proper argumentation or justification in a different culturally religious system, i.e. the *velayat-e faqih* in the Islamic Republic.

Moreover, Satrapi's message in regarding democracy as an "illusion" is similar to her rejection of being a feminist. She seems to have more inclinations towards the inclusive and pluralistic understanding of feminism. Accordingly, one can argue that her criticism towards democracy has roots in her belief in the global concept of democracy, the base of which is respect for liberal and individual set of rights. According to Blaug and Schwarzmantel, "invocations of 'We the people' can lead to ideas of 'organic democracy', in which the people are defined as a unitary bloc in terms of opposition to an 'Other', which comprises minorities of an ethnic or racial or political kind" (2001, p. 2). This, once again, is in line with Satrapi's *intentio auctoris*.

The most common definition of democracy equates with considering fair and free *elections* in which a substantial body of qualified adults can take part. Also "during the intervals between elections, citizens can seek to influence public policy through a wide variety of other intermediaries: interest associations, social movements, locality groupings, clientelistic arrangements, and so forth" (Schmitter and Karl, 2009, p. 6). Another commonly accepted feature of democracy that can be associated with universality is the *majority rule*. According to Schmitter and Karl, any government that manages to make "decisions by combining the votes of more than half of those eligible and present is said to be democratic, whether that majority emerges within an electorate, a parliament, a committee, a city council, or a party caucus" (2009, p. 6). Thirdly, democracies should also have some space for *cooperation* between different authorities, parties, movements and policies. In contemporary political discourse, the idea of cooperation can go hand in hand with the idea of civil society. Civil society, according to Schmitter and Karl, is "an intermediate layer of governance between the individual and the state that is capable of resolving conflicts and controlling the behaviour of members without public coercion" (2009, pp. 7-8). The final central feature of democracy is either directly or indirectly elected *representatives*. The representatives are usually members of political elites and professionals who do significant works in modern democracies and fill state key offices. It is argued that without them, democracies can easily fail. The question here, regarding the ruler of the society, is the process through which these elites are chosen and the ways based on which they hold accountable for their actions. Although Satrapi did not talk in details about democracy, in my opinion, her views are mostly oriented towards an intermediate relation between the state and civil society among other features of democracy. The Islamic Republic, in many critic's views, falls within democracies with fledgling civil societies. This might be due to the fact that Iran does not have universal suffrage based on the four features of democracy discussed above. These features are only

general and can differ to a considerable degree in different institutions. This is confirmed by Blaug and Schwarzmantel “if democracy is far from straightforward in its theory, if the historical trajectory of democratic politics leaves large questions which have not been and cannot be finally resolves, the same is true of the problem of practice” (2001, p. 6). In order for a democracy to exist in practice, the politics should move away from autocracy. This movement could be a mixture of different elements and procedures that are differently democratic. For example, in the process of ultimate decision making, the state can make substantive decision, which the general public may not agree with (e.g. compulsory *hejab* in Iran). As individuals or different parties are supposed to be equally active in political actions, their special preferences might not be taken or acted upon by the rulers. In other words, the public favourite course of action might be in sharp contrast with that of the state. Also, the political process might not be based on the autonomy of individuals (e.g. lack of individuality in Iran), and may be decided on the state’s considering the national interest or some other official reasoning. Finally, the chief executive body may not be directly chosen by citizenry, e.g. election of *vali-ye faqih*. While each of the above features can be considered as an element in making democracy happen, they should not be seen as “standards for evaluating the performance of particular regimes” (Schmitter and Karl, 2009, p. 12). It would also be wrong to conclude them as part of the generic meaning of democracy. Consequently, the compulsory *hejab* or lack of individuality can be considered as a form of democracy, while many like Satrapi strongly disagrees with. Different ideologies about democracy might make it easier to apply and approach, but they are not necessarily prerequisites to make it possible.

In what follows, I intend to discuss the connotations of the word ‘democracy’ in the Islamic context. The context of this debate is Khomeini’s conviction that the relationship between democracy as a “Western” product and Islam is that of antagonism. As the Islamic Republic has been historically against the United States and many other European countries, considering them as the Great or Little Satans, this antagonism marks opposition to democracy. My discussion regarding the compatibility of Islam with democracy would benefit from considering different perspectives of scholars and thinkers in the Muslim world. As mentioned earlier, the Islamic world is different from “real” Islam. It is ‘Muslims’ that give meaning to Islam. Geaves describes the concept of “real Islam” as a kind of “ideal” society manifested at the time of the Prophet of Islam in Medina. “Muslim societies since that period can be seen to represent the ‘real’: pragmatic attempts that are usually perceived as falling short of the Qur’an’s vision of community” (2005, p. 76). However, with the belief that Islam is perfectly practical at any time, the “real” and “ideal” is still obtainable “despite the differences over where the ideal can be found” (Geaves, 2005, p. 76).

Not all Muslims speak the same language and share the same ideology regarding democracy. To many like Ali Benhaj, Sayyid Qutb or Abul-A'la Mawdudi, democracy equals unbelief (*kofr*) and is diametrically incompatible with Islam. On the other hand, Mahmud al-Aqqad, Mohsin Kadivar, Abdolkarim Soroush or Bassam Tibi, believe that democracy is essential to Islam. Bernard Lewis in his *Islam in History* argues that, democracy is outside the Muslim world (1993, ch. 26). Samuel P. Huntington believes that “Western” culture is tied with the separation of religion from state which is a foreign concept in Islam. Believing in binary discussions of “East” and “West”, Huntington sees Islam and not just Islamic fundamentalism as the main problem of “West”. “He asks rhetorically, ‘Where does Europe end? And answers, ‘Where Western Christianity ends and Islam and Orthodoxy begin.’” (Huntington as cited in Stepan, 2009, p. 118). For Huntington, other religious civilisations in the world “lack the unique bundle of cultural characteristics necessary to support Western-style democracy” (as cited in Stepan, 2009, p. 118). The same Manichean ideology exists among some Muslim scholars. Qutb (1906-66) states that “after the decay of democracy, to the extent of bankruptcy, the West has nothing to give to humanity... the leadership of Western man has vanished... it is time to take over and lead” (as cited in Goddard, 2002, p. 4). Both Qutb and Khomeini focus on the meaning of democracy as the sovereignty of people, a foundation which diametrically opposes the sovereignty of God (*hokumat-e Allah bar mardom*) in Islamic philosophy.<sup>114</sup> In Qutb’s view, the authentic Islamic society is the one ruled by Allah not by the people. The human being is incapable of governing himself. This is the meaning of theocracy. Khomeini also believes,

Islamic government is a government of law. In this form of government, sovereignty belongs to God alone and law is His decree and command. The law of Islam, divine command, has absolute authority over all individuals and the Islamic government. Everyone, including the Most Noble Messenger (s) and his successors, is subject to law and will remain so for all eternity—the law that has been revealed by God, Almighty and Exalted, and expounded by the tongue of the Qur’an and the Most Noble Messenger (s). If the Prophet (s) assumed the task of divine vicegerency upon earth, it was in accordance with divine command. God, Almighty and Exalted, appointed him as His vicegerent, “the vicegerent of God upon earth”; he did not establish a government on his own initiative in order to be leader of the Muslims. (1970, p. 29).

Overall, the position identified by Qutb and Khomeini is an issue for Islamic states. They identified that the foundational law is *shari’ah* in an Islamic state- therefore the government interprets *shari’ah* into legal codes but it does not create new laws not based on

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<sup>114</sup> According to Mehdi Bazargan “God who, by definition, is omniscient, omnipotent, sovereign, and aware of the good and evil is better qualified to judge what is proper for human beings than human beings themselves. Does this belief leave any other option for believers than unconditional surrender to God’s will?... you realize that this doctrine leaves no room for the freedom and will of the people to administer their own affairs and to question- much less reject- the representatives of God who claim immunity from error as successors to the prophet” (1998, pp. 74-5).

Islamic law- this is different governing process than in “Western” democracies where government is the law-maker. Some critics describe this as returning to traditional ideas and as a failure to go along with the modernisation process and the development of technology relevant in the world today. In a newly reformed message, Mawdudi argues that “a purified Islam needed to be practiced within the confines of an Islamic state which would provide the correct ideological framework for the nation to address modernisation” (Geaves, 2005, p. 90). In this way, Mawdudi ascribes sovereignty to God to govern human affairs. In Goddard’s view, what Qutb or Khomeini believe in “has not prevented the widespread use of the term today in the sense of a society which either claims or aspires to be governed according to the will of God” (2002, p. 5). However, Goddard argues that the sovereignty of God as advocated by Khomeini or others is not mentioned in the Qur’an or *ahadith* or the *Sunnah* of the Prophet. “It is in fact a modern phrase which is essentially a reaction to secularism as an ideology, and it is the latter which Qutb is essentially rejecting” (2002, p. 5). According to Geaves, “secularism, nationalism and Western models of democracy are all based on the Enlightenment ideal of the sovereignty of the people” (2005, p. 91). This is also true about Khomeini with reference to his “anti-Western” and anti-imperialist ideology regarding the “West”. In Khomeini’s views, Islam has a sworn enemy, namely the “West”. For Khomeini, the “Western” powers are “imperialists,<sup>115</sup> the oppressive and treacherous rulers, the Jews, Christians, and materialists [who] are all attempting to distort the truths of Islam and lead the Muslims astray” (Khomeini, 1970, p. 78). This rejection of democracy is much related to its attribution to the “Western” context, and thus incidental to assuming that the “separation of church and state and secularism are core features not only of Western democracy, but of democracy itself” (Stepan, 2009, p. 120). As the clichés are bound to repeat about Islam and Islamic world, the hostility of Islam with secularisation seems to become more stable. The prevailed feeling is that “there is a strict and irreducible opposition between two systems-Islam and non-Islam” (Filali-Ansary, 2009, p. 357). As Abdou Filali-Ansary argues, “to be a secularist has meant to abandon Islam, to reject altogether not only the religious faith but also its attendant morality and the traditions and rules that operate within Muslim societies” (2009, p. 357). Secularism has been therefore mistakably assumed to be the same as atheism or total unbelief. Filali-Ansary believes that secularism has long been existing within Muslim societies, however the current “fundamentalist” ideas contradict it and everything comes with it, namely democracy. He states, “as a historical process, secularization has so transformed life in Muslim societies that religion, or rather traditions built on religion, no longer supply the

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<sup>115</sup> By imperialists, Khomeini mostly meant Britain and USA. “The British imperialists penetrated the countries of the East more than three hundred years ago. Being knowledgeable about all aspects of these countries, they drew up elaborate plans for assuming control of them. Then came the new imperialists, the Americans and others. They allied themselves with the British and took part in the execution of their plans” (Khomeini, 1970, p. 87).

norms and rules that govern the social and political order” (2009, p. 360). However, secularisation has become an alien issue among Muslims, because it was more or less equal to “Westernisation”. This is rooted in the history of colonialism in Arab and Islamic civilizations. This history actually “gave birth to some great and lasting misunderstandings, as a result of which Muslims have rejected key aspects of modernity (secularization and, to some degree, democratization) as an alienation and a surrender of the historical self to the ‘Other’” (Filali-Ansary, 2009, p. 366). Filali-Ansary’s argument can explain the banishment of *Persepolis* and the accusation of *Islam setizi* put in place by Iranian officials. Satrapi’s “Western” secular background and her progressive views have been interpreted as imperialist or materialist approaches to separate Islam from politics and distort Islamic values. Hence, the condemnation of her work in the Islamic Republic.

Mark Tessler emphasises the important position of political liberalization and democracy among Arab scholars. In his *Islam and Democracy in the Middle East*, he shows the influence of Islam on attitudes towards liberalization and democracy. While some “Western” scholars believe that talking of democracy and human rights is of no use among Arabs and Muslims, Tessler’s research shows the interest of Lebanese, Jordanian and Egyptian political scientists and sociologists in emphasising the role of democracy in controlling the “unchecked authoritarianism” and the “political chaos” (Tessler, 2002, p. 338). As Tessler put it, studies of democracy are based upon two distinct concerns. One is the political process and the other is political culture. The political process is the kind of mechanisms “that make political leaders accountable to those they govern, including free, competitive, and regular elections” and political culture is the political orientations of citizens and “the need to develop civic and participatory norms at the level of the individual citizen” (2002, p. 338). Reluctance towards valorisation of democracy shows the level of commitment to democracy among citizens at large. In the case of Iran, according to Axworthy, it has proven that Iranian citizens “believe in or aspire to democracy” (Axworthy, 2013, p. 414). Satrapi’s critical position towards the policies of the Islamic Republic along with Amir & Khalil’s *Zahra’s Paradise* are good examples of democratic orientations of Iranian citizens. In Ronald Inglehart’s words “democracy is not attained simply by making institutional changes or through elite level manoeuvring. Its survival depends also on the values and beliefs of ordinary citizens” (2000, p. 96). The crisis of 2009 election demonstrated that democracy is not just limited to Satrapi and other elites. However, if democracy is controversial in the Iranian system, the problem lies in different interpretations of Islam by officials and clergies in Iran.

The applicability of this view is noted by Iliya Harik “who writes that ‘in the long run, of course, a democratic government needs a democratic political culture, and vice versa’” (as cited in Tessler, 2002, p. 338). Tessler’s studies concluded that the variance in attitudes of

Muslims towards democracy depend upon the variation in interpretations of Islamic laws by Muslims scholars and theologians. The conservative religious attachments ended up with venom towards democracy as an opposite to theocracy which is ruled by God. According to Vali Nasr, “Islamists view democracy not as something deeply legitimate, but at best or tactic that may be useful in gaining the power to build an Islamic state” (2009, p. 378). Unlike Islamists, Nasr believes that Muslim democrats “reject or at least discount the classic Islamist claim that Islam commands the pursuit of a *shari’ah* state, and their main goal tends to be the more mundane one of crafting viable electoral platforms and stable governing conditions” (Nasr, 2009, p. 377). Anwar Ibrahim believes that attributing the pure sovereignty only to God is an extremist view that is just a misreading of the religion. Ibrahim states that “freedom is the fundamental objective of the divine law. Islam has always expressed the primacy of ‘*adl*, or justice, which is a close approximation of what the West defines as freedom” (2009, p. 371). Justice, Ibrahim continues, “entails ruling according to the dictates of Islamic law, which emphasize consultation and condemn despotism and tyranny” (2009, p. 371). Unlike Khomeini and Qutb, who believe that imperatives of Islam are not in line with the elements of constitutional democracy, Ibrahim claims that “freedom of conscience, freedom of expression, and the sanctity of life and property” are clearly stated in the Qur’an, *hadith* and *Sunnah* of the Prophet (2009, p. 371). Furthermore, by embracing the concept of *shura* or consultation by Qur’an (chapter 42), Islam has always been supportive of democracy. Filali-Ansary strongly believes that “democracy may even end up being described as a Western adaptation of an originally Islamic principle” (2009, p. 362). Mohamed Abed Jabri states that “democracy is the only principle of political legitimacy which is acceptable nowadays in Muslim societies” (as cited in Filali-Ansary, 2009, p. 362). Among those who support democracy in Islam, “a guided democracy” is a system that works within the limits set by *shari’ah*. “Iran may be considered as a case where this kind of doctrine has been implemented” (Filali-Ansary, 2009, p. 362). In addition to the elements which are common among constitutional democracies, Ansary believes that Iran enjoys “elected parliaments and executives [...] and a high council of experts and a religious guide who are entrusted with ensuring that the laws and decisions made by democratically elected bodies are in conformity with religious principles and rules” (2009, p. 362). The necessity of consultation and its requirements in the Iranian ruling system made it a kind of Islamic democracy.

In supporting the idea of Islam’s compatibility with democracy, Mahmud al-‘Aqqad (1889-1964) as a modernist and liberal scholar focuses on two concepts of *ijma’* (consensus) and *bay’a* (allegiance of members). As Goddard analysed, the former is considered as the “third foundation of Islamic law”, in which the Muslim community or their legal representatives decide who is going to be the ruler of the society (2002, p. 7). The latter means



securing the prerogative of ruling by validating through the public. This concept used to be a legal contract between rulers and ruled in the early ages of Islam. The scholarly interpretations of Islam show that the divine narratives are no longer defined in a monolithic way. As Ansary put it, “religious attitudes are no longer defined in terms of a combination of strict observation of rituals and the adoption of pre modern views, but rather as an informal but deeply felt adherence to principles of morality” (2009, p. 365). With reference to an example from the Qur’an, *sureh Al-Baqarah*, verse 256 (*La ikrah-a fi din*), meaning there is no compulsion in religion, Stepan emphasises on the strong nature of “Islamic tolerance” in the Qur’an (2009, p. 365). This gives way to ideas of human rights activists and democratic theorists like Satrapi and others, that there shall be no obligation imposed upon citizens in a Muslim community. One must acknowledge that different atrocities can be committed in the name of Islam. The Islamic fundamentalists and extremists flagrantly violate the citizen’s basic and natural rights to justify their political behaviours by manipulating the Islamic injunctions. It is argued that in such a context, Islam is being considered as an opposition or resistance to democracy.

In short, democratization of the *velayat-e faqih* is mostly concerned by groups of reformists from both religious and non-religious sects. The reformists argue that the modern requirements of the time need reinterpretations of Islamic doctrine to make it compatible with the complexity of the modern time i.e. human rights issues. Playing an active role in forming a civil society and pluralistic formulation of the authority has expedited the scholarly discussions of governance in post-Khomeini Iran. By reinterpreting the religious texts, modern reformists have tried to limit the authority and power of the *vali-ye faqih* and increased the public role in political decision making. New models of governance are suggested with the aim of circumscribing the guardianship and limiting it to supervisory position, rather than the complete administration of state affairs or the obligatory duty of public towards the supreme leader. The new state-religion models articulate that Islam is not the source of the problem in Iran, rather the political manipulation of Islam by those in power defined *velayat-e faqih* as an alternative to democracy. The legitimacy of a ruling system lies in not only the participation of people in political decision making, but also in preserving and respecting human rights.

From what discussed so far regarding how democracy is defined and functioning in the Islamic Republic, part of Satrapi’s concern about democracy has been addressed. However, Satrapi’s concern over totalitarianism or dictatorship in Iran does not seem to focus on this aspect of democracy i.e. power sharing or fair elections. Rather, her main argument, in my opinion, foregrounds that democracy is more about freedom of thought and speech, individualism and respect for human rights free from political interferences. She is aspiring to a world without political boundaries (similar to her position towards feminism), which may explain one of the reasons why she thinks that democracy is an “illusion”. Her views on

democracy are shared by many other scholars or elites in and out of Iran. Many critics have built a case for either a different democratic religious or non-religious political system that is benefited from the separation of religion and politics. Based on this, new relationship between religion and state would pave the way for secularism to creep into the Islamic political context.

### **The politics of secularism**

The secularised conception of Islam makes it difficult for many religious intellectuals to claim a religious identity based on doctrinal commands. The ethical practices of religious groups may be judged as a false return to traditionalism, which is resistant to modernity, liberalism and rationality. This trend establishes a binary basis between Islam and the “West” which adopts disrespect, racism and violence directed towards not only the militants and fundamentals but traditional Muslims. In Nash’s words: “Islam as a religion is the unwelcome guest at the feast of Western secularism” (2012, p. 15). Calls for liberalizing and secularising Islam, so that Muslims may live a ‘moderate’<sup>116</sup> existence are issued by a number of political perspectives from left and right. According to Mahmood, secularizing Islam as a political liberal project “enjoys the support of the US State Department, which recently allocated over \$1.3 billion under an initiative titled ‘Muslim World Outreach’ to transform the hearts and minds of Muslims through a range of theological, cultural, and pedagogical programs” (Mahmood, 2011, p. 96). This political agenda seeks to build networks with moderate scholars of Islam to promote a liberal interpretation of Islam through preaching, school curricula, TV shows and media production. This is in line with the US policies of War on Terror, a campaign claimed to have clear feminist agendas to create democracy in the Muslim world. This is confirmed by Geaves too. The British government’s definition of moderation seems to imply a core model which “is transferred from that of a universal deity experienced internally as a common mystical experience usually posited by essentialists, to that of ‘moderation’ that fits into the liberal/secular worldview of religion” (Geaves, 2004, p. 68). Although it is quite ambiguous how a ‘moderate version’ of Islam would decrease the possible attacks against the “West”, the incessant efforts were made to re-orchestrate Islamic doctrines free from politics.

It can be argued that secularism does not only mean evacuation of religion. As Mortimer argues, “secularism is not synonymous with godlessness, or with hostility to religion as such” (as cited in Nash, 2012, p. 13). However, the political agenda behind it suggests otherwise. Harvey Cox differentiates between secularism and secularization. As he explains, “secularization delivered culture and society from tutelage to religious control and a closed

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<sup>116</sup> According to Geaves, “once we begin to think of orientalism as a kind of Western projection to assert cultural and intellectual superiority over the Muslim world in which the West defines the Muslim reality and relays it back as the ideal model of Muslim perception of themselves, then we can begin to understand the problematic nature of powerful Western leaders defining for Muslims who is a ‘terrorist’ and who is ‘moderate’” (2004, p. 66).

metaphysical worldview and was basically a liberating development”, while secularism “is an ideology, a new closed world-view which functions very much like a new religion [...] like other *isms* it menaces the openness and freedom secularization has produced” (as cited in Nash, 2012, p. 13). Secularism sets against the public articulation of any religious identity. It aims at decoupling Islam from plural identity and making religion a private system of belief. This liberal worldview of religion, as Geaves puts it, appears not to be as pluralist as it claims though. “It is indeed another form of absolutism” (2004, p. 69). The dislike of secularism for multiculturalism and self-identification of Muslims in public provided the space for the emergence of “Islamic fundamentalism”. According to Gray and Ruthven, “Islamic fundamentalism is a kind of oriental Frankenstein’s monster, a flawed response to the McDonaldization of the world (as cited in Nash, 2012, p. 14). “Both Arab nationalism and Islamism are effectively products of Orientalism in reverse” (Nash, 2012, p. 17). As Minoo Moallem argues, “the creation of an Islamic ethnicity is as much the work of orientalism and Western representational practices as it is the result of negotiations and contestations of Islamic nationalism and fundamentalism” (2005, p. 119). Mahmood also believes that the agenda behind the message of Osama bin Laden was clear. He simply wanted to end the “Western” domination on “Arabs and Muslims who are currently witnessing one of the most unabashedly imperial projects undertaken in modern history, a project that, as a number of observers have pointed out, has done more to fuel the militant cause than to eliminate it” (2011, p. 97). As Ruthven puts it, the fundamentalist mentality is “a religious way of being that manifests itself in a strategy by which beleaguered believers attempt to preserve their distinctive identity as a people or group in the face of modernity and secularization” (as cited in Nash, 2012, p. 18). Within the Iranian context, with reference to their history of “anti-Westernism”, “foundationalism” appeared as a form of resistance to “Western” cultural hegemony. As the result, the function of nationalism defied secularism. In fact, Khomeini’s strict belief in the full-fledged authority of the *faqih* and full application of Islamic practices in the context of society has been organised as a response to modern “Western” secular influences.

As Mahmood argues, Abdolkarim Soroush is one of those intellectuals who is “testimony to the hegemony that liberalism commands as a political ideal for many contemporary Muslims, a hegemony that reflects the enormous disparity in power between Euro-American and Muslim countries today” (2011, pp. 97-98). Soroush’s asserted “model of governance is an ‘extra-religious’ argument, one that cannot be articulated through an intrareligious debate” (Mavani, 2013, p. 203). As Mavani put it, Soroush’s model claims “independence” of state from religion rather than its “separation” (Soroush’s proposed model is different from Satrapi’s simplistic rendition of separation of religion from the state,

however, they both share the same concern towards the nature of political system and the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic). This model focuses on the new hermeneutic of the divine text which represents a sharp break from the contemporary form of *ijtihad* undertaken by a fully qualified *mojtahid*. According to Soroush, understanding the divine text is time-bound. This means that “changes in knowledge render natural and Islamic matters that were once considered ‘unthinkable’ and ‘non-Islamic’” (Mir-Hosseini, 2005, p. 228). He is criticising the “*olama*’s unwillingness to admit this at a theoretical level and to take consciously planned steps to revise their understanding in the light of current realities” (Mir-Hosseini, 2005, p. 228). In this way, Soroush challenges the institution of *velayat-e faqih* in Iran, referring to the absolute authority of the *faqih* to veto the decisions made by the parliament. By creating a space for secularity, Soroush has made an adaptable version of Islam with modern circumstances. It is argued by him that Sunni Muslims who do not believe in the continuation of successorship through the lines of Imams, have established an autonomous civil society which is more in line with the division of religion from the state. According to Soroush, since no other authority following the Prophet enjoys divine power in Sunni Islam, the state affairs became institutionalized and there is no obligation for anyone to obey the *vali-ye faqih*. As Mavani states, this is quite similar to the separation of state from church in American constitution. In such a context, there is no pressure on citizens to promote religious ethics. But, there is no place for institutionalising the religious rules within the public context. The laws administered by the state are religion free. Soroush’s argument is in fact drawn upon finding alternatives in orthodox practices of Islam to make it compatible with secular liberal ideals and his line of thought has never been reversed. According to Mahmood, he does not even consider the possibility of keeping the Islamic practices as embraced by many Muslims today “and rethink some of the secular liberal values that are so readily upheld today, such as freedom of choice, autonomy, and indifference to religious forms of belonging” (2011, p. 98). While Soroush’s concerns, can be argued, to be similar to that of Satrapi, there is one main difference between the two. While critical of the “Islamic fundamentalism”, in my opinion, Satrapi supports a reformative and progressive approach to Islam. This secular conception of Islam is adhered to a private and individual system of belief which promotes the separation of religion from state (as desired by Satrapi). The protagonist of this secular model is an autonomous individual and “self-choosing subject who might appreciate the spiritual truths religious traditions symbolize, but is enlightened enough to understand that these truths command no epistemological or political force in this world” (Mahmood, 2011, p. 94). Embedded in this secular model is the conception of freedom of choice for individuals who animate their own desires free from the force of the religion, scriptures, traditions, rituals or state organisations. Satrapi would properly be fixed into such framework.

In discussions of secularism, what is at stake is the mode of pluralism. If public culture is being missed from conditions of modernity, then its democratic iteration will be undermined. As Souillac argues, it is wrong to conflate *laïcité* with state authoritarianism. Referring to the *hejab* ban in France in 2004, Souillac believes that confusion between secularism and state authoritarianism “detracts from those positive aspects of secular political culture that foster participatory democracy precisely because secular values hinge on their articulation in a viable public sphere in which all are encouraged to demonstrate their views, and passionately if they wish” (2011, p. 87). He believes there should always be a balance between “respecting the individual’s rights to freedom of conscience and religion... and maintaining a public sphere devoid of all religious symbolisms” (2011, p. 87). Secularism, in Souillac’s words, should be motivating and empowering for citizens including those minorities who are marginalised because of their religion. It is therefore unfortunate to reduce secularism to fundamental contemporary French policies, because this confusion does not serve the important principle of pluralism and republicanism. It is in such context that Satrapi criticises the French government’s policies on the *hejab*. Based on debates on the *intentio auctoris*, and with regards to Satrapi’s neutral and dual position towards the *hejab*, it could be argued that the type of secularism she is advocating (just like her position towards feminism or the universal human rights) is plural and public oriented, the axis of which is respecting and tolerating the individual freedom. Certainly, the *hejab* ban in France in the name of secularism led to a “lose-lose situation, discrediting Western judicial and parliamentary democratic institutions and running against European human rights laws against discrimination. They do not serve the cause of women’s autonomy, and can reinforce instead that of xenophobia” (Souillac, 2011, p. 94). This concept, which is in line with “otherisation”, mostly concerns Satrapi.

In conclusion, notions of human rights and democracy are heavily influenced under the politics of both Islamism and secularism. Secularism in its plurality assumes sovereignty for individuals while Islamism calls for a collective national and communal identity. As far as secularism is concerned, Islamism exists i.e. the antimodernist, anti-secular or “anti-Western” reaction. According to Souillac, to challenge the binary oppositions of Islam and secularism (as a “Western” product), it would be wiser to consider the public culture of *laïcité* which accounts for democratic citizenship. This focuses on deterritorializing Islam using “a universal form of Islam delinked from the specificities of local cultures” (Nash, 2012, p. 19). This means bringing about religious reformation based on “foundations of the exercise of citizenship, through which citizens can consistently reinterpret the collective historical experience of popular sovereignty, and contest the democratic legitimacy of governments, laws, and policies” (Souillac, 2011, p. 88). Satrapi’s rejection of a system whether it is Islamic or secular

is therefore in line with the plural notion of sovereignty for individuals. She attempts to deal with an individual identity at a global level. This is different from sovereignty of people in a Western democratic system in which individuals still have to remain within the law as an absolute framework and they are considered as criminalised or enemies of the state if they breach the law. An example of this case is Satrapi's opinion about the freedom of choice in clothing in any context, secular or Islamic. She believes if one wants to be naked, s/he should be free, while this is in contradiction with the state laws made under the sovereignty of people. Her criticism towards the Islamic system in Iran or the secular system in France is a means to claim her identity as an autonomous free individual.

### **Human rights and *velayat-e faqih* as moral politics**

Investigating the situation of democracy and a just social order in the Islamic Republic, as discussed earlier, could be actualized through discussions of *vali-ye faqih*, the scope of his power and authority and the process of his election. Furthermore, proceeding to a thorough analysis of democracy in Khomeini's system may also be possible through observing different understandings of human rights in different contexts. As Elena Namli argues, law, morality and politics are hand in hand and essential in understanding the human rights. In her *Human Rights as Ethics, Politics and Law*, Namli critiques the monopoly of liberal understanding of human rights "as independent individuals, rational reasoning as the opposite term of traditional reasoning, and freedom as autonomy" (2013, p. 139). She believes that the "Cartesian individualism, modernistic rationalism" and freedom of individuals "includes a sizeable colonial legacy and Western origin" (2013, p. 139). This is problematic in considering the human rights at universal level as it suppresses the complexity and uniqueness of "other cultural and ideological narratives" (2013, p. 139). My argument is based on understanding the system of *velayat-e faqih* and human rights within the moral and political nature. This opens the gates of contextual evaluation and interpretation and criticism of both entities. I consider the case of *velayat-e faqih* and its implementation in the social, religious and political spheres in the discussions of its compatibility with democracy and human rights. What needs to be avoided is considering a fixed and absolute framework for democracy, human rights and *velayat-e faqih* or in other words putting them as positive laws.

In Namli's words, there is no concept of international universal human rights. Many human rights activists like Satrapi consider human rights as applicable universally with no enforcement of violence, and believe that human rights should be accompanied with "Western" liberal democracy to be applicable in "non-Western" societies. This view, however, according to Namli, belongs to secular, liberal and "Western" proponents of democracy and human rights, in itself is wrong "since the concept of freedom as autonomy lies at the moral

core of liberalism and any violent enforcement of liberalism must be seen as a self-contradiction” (Namli, 2013, p. 140).

Among those who believe in the universality of human rights, as it is argued by Namli, there are many who seek to persuade others with the idea that human rights is violated in a religious context (e.g. *velayat-e faqih*). The risk of the imperialist and reductionist view of universal human rights lies in considering it as politics free and a “Western” product in opposition with the traditional cultures and civilizations. However, we need more sensitivity as well as reliable knowledge in different religious settings as “religion neither can nor should be excluded from politics” and “as an important part in the life of many individuals and societies, it is a casual factor in politics and must therefore be involved in a transparent fashion in a political discourse” (Namli, 2013, p. 141). As Namli believes, out of religious context, the politics of human rights are not legitimate. Some might argue that human rights are rational and in opposition with the base of the Islamic Republic which is foundational and traditional. Here, there is a twofold reduction. One is presenting the system of *velayat-e faqih* as an Islamic dictatorial and thus an in-flexible legal system, and the other is the ideology of human rights as absolute set of laws which cannot be approached in different social or religious context. Both reductions are problematic *per se*. By presenting the *velayat-e faqih* as an Islamic system, we are generalising the notion of Islam and thus otherise it as contrasting the “Western” ideology. However, Islam is a set of divine laws which requires “an advanced interpretative apparatus before it can be used in a social and legal setting” (Namli, 2013, p. 142). This gives way to *ijtihad*.<sup>117</sup> New and up-to-date interpretations of the Qur’an according to contingent needs are encouraged by Islam. Scholars like Abdullahi Ahmed an-Na’im believe that “any understanding of *Sharia* is always the product of *ijtihad*” and that “there is nothing to prevent the emergence of a new consensus that *ijtihad* should be freely exercised to meet the new needs and aspirations of Islamic societies” (as cited in Namli, 2013, p. 142). In Na’im’s view, the contextual interpretation of the Islamic law is the responsibility of all Muslims in all era. In this regards, there is no universality defined for Islam as an abstract set of laws.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> The daily demands of individuals are addressed with proper reference to the Qur’an. This is called *ijtihad* or independent reasoning. According to O’Mahony, Pererburs & Shomali (2006): “*Ijtihad* is a very demanding qualification and involves deep knowledge of several disciplines and mastering several skills” (p. 45).

<sup>118</sup> There is a difference between Shi’a and Sunni in terms of *ijtihad*. According to Shi’a, the Qur’an can be interpreted only by those who have the necessary knowledge to do so. In Shi’a Islam, not everybody is allowed to interpret the text. For the Qur’an to answer the daily demands, there should be *olama* or *foqaha* or *mojtahidin* to derive the rules of *fiqh* from the Qur’an. According to Shi’i *tafsir* of the related *ayat*, it is compulsory for a group of Muslims to study religion and become experts so that the others can refer to them for their problems and questions. This *tafsir* of *ijtihad* is applied in the system of *velayat-e faqih*. The *faqih* is considered as the expert in Islamic *fiqh* and is qualified enough to do *ijtihad*. “Thus, it becomes clear that in the Shi’i thought respect for and obedience to the *faqih* is

On the other hand, considering “human rights as politics” as Michael Ignatieff argues, reveals the selective and particular interests of governmental and non-governmental activists who invoke the attractive moral aspect of human rights rather than its political specificities. Ignatieff believes, in terms of human rights, it is impossible to claim neutrality or impartiality. This idea makes the universality of human rights impossible. Notwithstanding, he believes in the “moral universalism” and “liberal individualism” to practice human rights properly (as cited in Namli, 2013, p. 144). This is actually in line with Satrapi’s concern over the freedom of choice as an individual. As mentioned before, she believes that the very recognition of her individual freedom makes her rights a universally valid issue. Based on Namli’s argument regarding “Western” notion of freedom as the legacy of colonialism, Satrapi and her line of thinking can be argued in opposition. Here, Satrapi presents a “Western” definition of freedom of choice while “individualism is not a universal moral content of human rights” (Namli, 2013, p. 146). Namli strongly believes that ‘individualism’ like many other articulated norms is political and in need of critique and development and thus cannot be considered as a universal norm. In her words, universality means preventing from declaring any norm to be universal (2013, p. 146). Human rights laws which are universally accepted includes a set of political agreements between the states worldwide, however there is no legitimate body to enforce them; they should be implemented “by means of national policies and legislation” (Namli, 2013, p. 146). In this respect, it can be argued that Khomeini with the foundation of *velayat-e faqih* found a unique way to sustain and implement human rights laws in the context and within the parameters of *velayat-e faqih*. At the same time, with reference to the critics of Khomeini’s system, there exist different interpretations as to what proper implementation of human rights could be in Iran. Consequently, recognising the alternative notions of individuality and freedom of choice (especially those which are promoted by the “West” and known by Satrapi) does not mean rejection and non-implementation of human rights. Instead, it can be said that Khomeini’s system creates an opportunity for the opponents of “Western” individualism to apply a more contextual (based on different national, cultural and religious contexts) practices of human rights. The role of democracy becomes strengthen in inviting various (“non-Western”) governmental authorities and different groups and individuals to engage in approaches to human rights implementation more practically within the society’s national policies. In the case of human rights, quite opposite to manipulation of her work by imperialist

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respect for and obedience to knowledge and piety that qualify someone to have such a position and not to the person as such” (O’Mahony, Pererburs & Shomali, 2006, p. 45). It so emerges that unqualified individuals cannot derive rules from the Qur’an, or interpret the Qur’an based on their knowledge, needs and preferences. In fact, one should discriminate between hermeneutics and *ijtihad* in Shi’a context. Hermeneutics is mostly based on the fore-knowledge and decision of the interpreter. This type of interpretation is forbidden in Shi’a Islam and is against the divine revelation. Relying on one’s former experience, background, knowledge and beliefs can deviate the interpreter from the origin of Qur’an, whereas Qur’an must be interpreted by Qur’an according to Shi’as.



market, *Persepolis* has been read or interpreted in line with the current dominant “Western” definition of individuality, which is mostly shared by many “Western” or “Eastern” scholars. However, as argued by Namli, what really matters in discussions of human rights or secularism is not the notion of “individuality”, rather, the pluralistic and inclusive and contextualised nature of discourses to avoid any exclusion or xenophobia.

### **Iran and the West in media and politics**

The history of modern Iran in the last hundred years is literally impossible to review without including its relations with foreign powers. In the thirty-five years since the Islamic Revolution, the successive exacerbation of tension with “Western” countries, “Iran continued to arouse seething passions [...] as a result of the incredibly detailed, highly focused attention of the media to the event and Iran’s demonization for years after it” (Said, 1997, p. 81). There has been an intense focus on Iran and Iranian socio-political issues in world media. Since the Iranian hostage crisis (November 1979 – January 1981),<sup>119</sup> Iran has been identified by the US as a hostile country.

Due to the length of the period (444 days), the poor handling of the incident by Washington and its intense media coverage the event had a strong impact on American public opinion. The episode was framed as ‘America held hostage’ by the US media, which depicted the entire nation victimised by ‘Islamic terrorists’ (Poole and Richardson, 2006, 122).

On January 22<sup>nd</sup> 2002, on the occasion of his State of the Union Address, former US President George W. Bush grouped Iran with North Korea (Democratic People’s Republic of Korea) and Iraq in the “axis of evil”.<sup>120</sup> This has been intensified by various forms of stereotyping Islamic culture and religion. Edward Said believes that the hostage crisis of Americans in Iran “came to symbolize represented American relations with the Muslim world” (p. 83), not just Iran. Actually, what happened (and lasted for a few months) perpetuated the attitudes of many Americans towards Muslims in general. To many in the USA, being a Shi’a Muslim means being “anti-American” (p. 84). And being anti-American means trouble. A few weeks after the crisis, a *New York Times* headline approached the issue of the crisis by making

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<sup>119</sup> A diplomatic crisis between Iran and the USA resulted after Iranian students supporting the revolution seized the US embassy in Tehran and held hostage fifty-five people (US diplomatic personnel and other US citizens) for 444 days. According to Edward Said, “the Iran story” has become the focused attention of the media since the seizure of the US embassy in Tehran (1979, p. 80). This has significantly affected the opinion of the general public, and saturated them with anti-Iranian and anti-Islamic notions.

<sup>120</sup> The term is highly evocative in the USA, as it was originally used during WWII to indicate Germany, Italy and Japan. However, it is worth mentioning that the current “Western” geopolitics seek to change the perception of Iran because of new situation in the Middle-East (ISIS).

a link between Shi'ism and the seizure. From then on, there was no distinction between Iranians and Arabs (p. 88).<sup>121</sup>

Furthermore, based on Said's argument, Iran cannot be ignored by the "West", as it was one of the major suppliers of oil and gas in the region which is politically and strategically regarded as volatile (Said, 1997, p. 6). The geo-political position of Iran in the region as "the first political creature in the Middle East" (Farhi, 2012, p. 4) is a prominent feature that puts Iran in the news today. Another example that pointed the finger at Iran was the Lebanon-Israeli conflict in 2006. Two Israeli soldiers were killed at the border line between Syria and Lebanon by Hezbollah missiles. Beaumont in *The Guardian* in 2006 wrote that "both Hezbollah and Iran have threatened retaliation for an attack in which a top Iranian general and six Hezbollah fighters were killed by Israeli army a week before" (Beaumont, *The Guardian*, 2006). It is also believed that the modern facilities and complicated war equipment of Hezbollah well reflected the military aid and support of Iran. "The conflict confirmed the deepening hostility between Iran and Israel, and the awareness in Israel of the multi-layered threat from Iran" (Axworthy, 2013, p. 393). With the toppling of Saddam and following these two important events in the Middle East, the theory of a Shi'a Crescent formed. Coined by King Abdullah of Jordan, and backed up by Mubarak in Egypt, UAE, the British government and others, Iran was believed to destabilize the region with the help of the Shi'a population of Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.<sup>122</sup> The connections of different Shi'a political groups with Iranian clerics that started from the Revolution of 1979 has explicitly aggravated the anti-Iranian circumstances, contributing to the malevolent image of Iran in the region.

Apart from the huge oil and gas reserves, Iran's embarkment of the plan for generation of the nuclear power, almost independently of the "Western's" partnership,<sup>123</sup> exacerbates the political relations between Iran and the "West". In addition to the peaceful nuclear programme, there were some claims by a number of "Western" countries that Iran plans to build nuclear weapons. Although, Iran consistently denied it, but after the testing of one of its missiles in 2000 and the talk of one Iranian officials based on the need of the world of Islam to "acquire nuclear weapons to balance those of Israel", "Western" concerns intensified (Axworthy, 2013,

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<sup>121</sup> That is why, "many people, even otherwise well educated people, think of the Iranians as Arabs, but they are not [...] in many ways Iranians have traditionally defined themselves against the Arab identity of much of the rest of the Middle East region" (Axworthy, 2013, p. xx).

<sup>122</sup> The Shi'a Crescent theory actually formed as a "smokescreen to divert Western attention away from the awkward fact that the most vicious anti-Western extremism and terrorism of the previous decade had been Sunni in origin" (Axworthy, 2013, p. 394).

<sup>123</sup> In 1970s, with the full support of America, Iran's nuclear energy production started. Later in 1979, with the help of "German contractors Kraftwerk Union (KWU), the work had reached an advanced stage", and in 1995, after an agreement between Iran and Russia, the work on Bushehr reactor was almost finished. Finally, in "September 2011 Iran announced the plant had finally begun producing electricity" (Axworthy, 2013, p. 381).

p. 381). On the other hand, from the official point of view of the Iranian government,<sup>124</sup> many found it hard to believe that,

If a state like Britain for example (in the middle of peaceful Europe, and protected by EU and Nato alliances) continues to value nuclear weapons for self-defence, the same should apply for a state like Iran, which suffers attacks from Iraqi weapons of mass destruction in the 1980s, and whose neighbours include some that are unstable (Iraq, Afghanistan), several near-neighbours that are nuclear-armed (Russia, Israel, China) and one neighbour that is both unstable and nuclear-armed (Pakistan). (Axworthy, 2013, p. 382)

Consequently, Iran was under international pressure to agree on further inspections of the nuclear installations by NPT (Non-Proliferation Treaty) since 2002. From the Iranian perspective, the US was behind the EU Three<sup>125</sup> and is opposed to any kind of nuclear programme let alone the uranium enrichment. In 2006, the IAEA (the International Atomic Energy Agency which is responsible for checking the compliance with NPT) announced that Iran failed to meet the obligations and therefore imposed the first set of sanctions against Iran. Furthermore, “Israel has warned that it may take military action to destroy the Iranian nuclear (weapon) programme if the programme is not halted by other means” (Axworthy, 2013, p. 386). Following this, a Pentagon consultant added that:

For some advocates of military action, the goal in Iran is not regime change but a strike that will send a signal that America still can accomplish its goals. Even if it does not destroy Iran’s nuclear network, there are many who think that thirty-six hours of bombing is the only way to remind the Iranians of the very high cost of going forward with the bomb. (Hersh, 2006)

Along with the nuclear issue, the harsh and radical position of former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad<sup>126</sup> towards Israel outraged the “Western” world. Ahmadinejad’s speech included a direct quotation from Ayatollah Khomeini. Israel must be wiped off from the map.<sup>127</sup> His reference to the ‘myth’ of the Holocaust was largely condemned outside Iran. Accordingly, Slaughter in Avineri (2007) believes that: “Iran with a popular, accountable, and rights-regarding (PAR) government would not be a threat, even if it developed a nuclear weapon. But an Iran with a president who denies the Holocaust” would be a potential threat.

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<sup>124</sup> Needless to mention that Iranians themselves have different views on the nuclear programme. According to Axworthy: “within Iran the nuclear dispute produced an upsurge of nationalist feeling in favour of Iran’s right to nuclear power, and it was difficult (not just because of regime censorship, but because of the general strong feeling on the subject) for anyone to express dissent” (2013, p. 385).

<sup>125</sup> EU Three refers to the troika consisting the United Kingdom, Germany and France.

<sup>126</sup> Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (b. 1956) was the sixth president of Iran for eight years from 2005 to 2013. He was famous for being a “highly devout Shiite and a strident nationalist whose desire was the Middle East without Israel”, and for his highly anti-American policies (Watson, 2008, p. 124).

<sup>127</sup> The words of Imam Khomeini were included in Ahmadinejad’s speech. “*In rejimeh eshghalgareh Qods bayad az safeyeh ruzegar mahv shavad*”, which literally means that “this Jerusalem-occupying regime must disappear from the page of time” (Axworthy, 2013, p. 388). Although the wording of Ahmadinejad had astounded many in the “West”, the Iranian officials declared that it was nothing new based on Khomeini’s line of thinking.

As a BBC news article states, the Holocaust issues and the conference<sup>128</sup> convened in Tehran in December 2006 created an opportunity for scholars and thinkers to express their points and views freely about the Holocaust which is not possible in many European countries. This action of the Islamic Republic was considered as not acceptable and a danger for the “West” (2006).

At his monthly media briefing in London, UK Prime Minister Tony Blair called the Holocaust conference ‘shocking beyond belief’. He described Iran as a ‘major strategic threat’ to the Middle East, saying: ‘Iran is deliberately causing maximum problems for moderate governments and for ourselves in the region - in Palestine, in Lebanon and in Iraq’. He added there was ‘little point’ in including Iran and Syria in regional issues, such as Iraq, ‘unless they are prepared to be constructive’ and that it would be a ‘major challenge’ to deal with Iran. German Chancellor Angela Merkel, flanked by visiting Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, said: ‘we reject in the strongest terms conferences held in Iran on the supposed non-existence of the Holocaust. Germany will never accept this and will use all possibilities at its disposal to oppose it.’ (BBC news, 2006)

International pressure and the trade sanctions were obvious outcomes. Mostly applied by the US government- especially after the hostage crisis- or under its pressure, the sanctions<sup>129</sup> limited Iranian businesses, damaged the economic system, increased unemployment and caused inflation. According to BBC news (2015), the sanction plans on Iran are approved by the UN, the EU and some other countries such as Japan and South Korea. Prohibiting almost all trade with Iran targeted the oil industry which is an important issue in government expenditure. Although the US claimed that the sanctions have been enforced to exert pressure on the Iranian decision to pursue a nuclear programme, their effects fell on the lives of ordinary citizens. The Iranian nuclear programme and the Holocaust provocation laid the region’s crimes at the Iranian door. The US administration with the support of the British government associated their difficulties in Iraq with Iran. They claimed that the Iranians played major role in destabilizing Iraqi situation. The inter-religious violence in Iraq was believed to be the cause of Shi’a/ Sunni struggles.<sup>130</sup> On the other hand, during the Iran-Iraq War (1980s), which lasted

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<sup>128</sup> Based on a BBC news report (2006): “Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has met delegates at a conference in Iran questioning the Holocaust, drawing widespread international criticism. Iran says it wants to debate what it calls taboos surrounding the Holocaust. Conference participants include white supremacists and Holocaust deniers”.

<sup>129</sup> “The four rounds of UN sanctions included: A ban on the supply of heavy weaponry and nuclear-related technology to Iran. A block on arms exports. An asset freeze on key individuals and companies. The EU also imposed its own sanctions, among them: Restrictions on trade in equipment which could be used for uranium enrichment. An asset freeze on a list of individuals and organisations that the EU believed were helping advance the nuclear programme, and a ban on them entering the EU. A ban on any transactions with Iranian banks and financial institutions. Ban on the import, purchase and transport of Iranian crude oil and natural gas - the EU had previously accounted for 20% of Iran’s oil exports. European companies were also stopped from insuring Iranian oil shipments” (BBC news, 2015).

<sup>130</sup> By contrast, there were good evidences that the largest number of suicide bombers and insurgents in Iraq were from Saudi Arabia, the “West’s” greatest ally in the region. This is reported in *Los Angeles*

for eight years, Iraq was supported by the US and other “Western” powers with the belief that it was necessary to control Iranian religious extremism (Axworthy, 2013, p. xxi). For similar reasons, according to Michael Axworthy (2013), the main aim was to control the Iranian power and presence in the region, the US funded Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan (2013, p. xxi). “With some justification, Iran viewed itself as the victim, and the fact that Saddam was then supported by the United States reinforced greatly in the Iranian collective psyche an image of America as arch-enemy” (Avineri, 2007, p. 44). It is argued that it was probably after the imposed war that the USA came to be known as the “Great Satan”<sup>131</sup> by the Islamic Republic. “Here was a beleaguered, God-fearing Islamic republic fighting against the Western, godless juggernaut” (Avineri, 2007, p. 44).

Based on the history of Iran’s relations with the “West”, the concept of discourse by Foucault (2005) makes sense to understand how a specific representation gains traction. One should keep in mind that the media, press and news reporting “are powerful to the extent that they profoundly influence the way that people understand certain objects, people and events. While the media may not fully determine public opinion, it does succeed in determining and normalizing its own topics of interest” (Fayyaz & Shirazi, 2013, p. 54). What becomes news actually forms our knowledge. According to Said, what is conveyed and interpreted by the press is “neither spontaneous nor completely ‘free’: ‘news’ does not just happen, pictures and ideas do not merely spring from reality into our eyes and minds, truth is not directly available” (1997, p. 48). “It is unrealistic to think that the news could somehow report the truth in a way that everyone would see” (Bennett, 2009, p. 36). Also it is inevitable that the truth is manipulated before broadcasting by the media.<sup>132</sup> Unfair and biased coverage can happen for a number of reasons. The press and policy relationship is not an easy one. The media and press abide by the rules and conventions. “The interplay of media, power and politics” are the realities that shape the message being transferred by the media (Kamalipour, 2010, p. xix). Since the rules are set by a fixed assumption, then the picture of Islam or Iran ought to be

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*Times* on 15 July 2007. Needless to mention that, the newspaper information is usually open to general public. “Although Bush administration officials have frequently lashed out at Syria and Iran, accusing it of helping insurgents and militias there, the largest number of foreign fighters and suicide bombers in Iraq come from a third neighbour, Saudi Arabia, according to a senior US military officer and Iraqi lawmakers. About 45% of all foreign militants targeting US troops and Iraqi civilians and security forces are from Saudi Arabia; 15% are from Syria and Lebanon; and 10% are from North Africa, according to official US military figures made available to *The Times* by the senior officer. Nearly half of the 135 foreigners in US detention facilities in Iraq are Saudis, he said” (Parker in *Los Angeles Times*, 2007).

<sup>131</sup> “Iranian leaders have characterised the United States as the Great Satan - an evil corrupter that pollutes society and destroys personal morality” See *The Great Satan vs. the Mad Mullahs* by Beeman (2005).

<sup>132</sup> For example, “CNN is often “domesticated” to serve the interests and address the concerns of particular culturally and politically aligned audience members rather than the general interests of the global audience at large” (Hafez, 2007 as cited in El-Nawawy, 2010, p. 6).

fixed. In Kai Hafez's words (2007), "The media follow rather than read"<sup>133</sup> (Hafez as cited in El-Nawawy, 2010, p. 6). Based on this view, the reporters are inevitably bound with clichés which have been taken for granted in the society for so long, as a result of a dominant policy. Every reporter is under some sort of pressure, Said continued, and this pressure is of "standardizing and stereotyping" (1997, p. 51). The reporters actually "bring more to the events they cover than they take away from them" (p. 51). This issue has ever been under dispute - that "journalists frequently construct the news rather than reflect it" (Roberts, 2013, p. 30). Based on the orientalist discussions, journalists' knowledge is more inclined to be assumed or constructed from the public norms. The rules that are restricting the reporting systems according to Hachten and Scotton, are either wrongly stereotyped by general conventions or are imposed by the "ruling government" (2013, p. 26). In a similar way, Mohammadi believes, "Media can be used by states to establish their definitions of the political, their versions of history; they are part of the ideological state apparatus, the force of repression" (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1994, p. 20).

Apart from the control of the ruling system, Alexandra Kitty (2005), in her *Don't Believe it! How Lies Become News*, states that "problems with news reporters don't just stem from their normal, everyday way of doing business – it's also the journalists' constraints that make them vulnerable to lies" (p. 43). Later on, she names a list of possible constraints, such as money, for example. According to Kitty, the media are a kind of business and "its survival depends on both consumers buying and using its services and its ability to generate profit" (p. 44). According to Levin, "the media, with a few exceptions such as national broadcasters, are first of all businesses that have to generate income, which requires producing stories that people want to read, watch or hear. Viewer interest is a first requirement" (2004, p. 273). Time is another constraint. New information never comes pre-packed, and it is never easily accessible. News need time to be investigate and shaped. Broadcasting the message of Islamic extremism which has already filled the minds of the general public might hasten the process of money making for media owners,<sup>134</sup> rather than the mere 'love and humanity' message (in case of Satrapi's work). Among all the aforementioned constraints, the most prominent one is the authority figure. The media, as it is argued by Errington & Miraglitta (2007), of a country is under the direct control of political authorities, or agencies associated to them. The mutual relationship between the media and government is not symmetrical according to Errington and Miraglitta. They believe that the government has "the whip hand" in such a relationship;

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<sup>133</sup> According to Dorman and Farhang, "the press as a factor in foreign policy usually rates only passing mention, and discussions are more often characterised by rhetoric, platitudes, clichés, and unsupported generalizations than by thoughtful analysis" (1987, p. 14).

<sup>134</sup> There are many other factors such as: convergence, circulation ratings, advertising, competition, story structure, uncooperative or difficult sources, lack of knowledge or training, focus groups or consultants, etc. (Kitty, 2005, pp. 46-49).

“government communications strategy includes everything from timing announcements to maximise (or minimise) coverage to the expensive advertising campaigns that now accompany major policy changes” (p. 82).

On the other hand, regarding the impact of politics on the press, Ben Levin talks about the suspicion between media and government as a prominent factor in “declining the credibility of both parties” (2004, p. 273). Levin states that some politicians may not have a favourable view of what media do in that they believe they “cannot get fair coverage of their work because the media are biased against them, either on partisan grounds or out of a simple dislike for anything to do with government” (Levin, 2004, p. 272). Obviously governments and politics provide stories and news for the media and are considered as the main sources of news for the media. Governments are relying upon media to make their information public. This does not necessarily confirm the mutual relations of the two. Media are often critical of the governments. “Media coverage thrives on wrongdoing, whether real or alleged. People seem to like to hear about crimes and misdemeanours of whatever kind. Scandals are also a subject of great public interest, and, therefore, of media coverage” (Levin, 2004, p. 279). This critical eye of the media has often forced the governments to be more cautious of what they say or do. John Pilger, an Australian film director, war correspondent and commentator made a documentary in 2010 about the role of the media in devastating wars like Iraq and Afghanistan. The case of Pilger clearly shows that “indeed, the exposure of wrongdoing and scandal is an important role of the media” (Levin, 2004, p. 279). In case of a problem, the media coverage focuses on who to blame as a solution to the problem.

In his documentary, *The War You Don't See*, he investigated the reporting and justifying methods of war crimes by the media. In his documentary, he quoted from a government official talking to a media agent, saying “if the people really knew the truth, the war would be stopped tomorrow, but of course, they don't know and they can't know” (Pilger, 2010). He believes that the creation of illusion has come a long way since Edward Bernays, the founder of modern propaganda - which was called the “invisible government” (Pilger, 2010). In this documentary, Stuart Ewen, a media historian, declared that “when you start using symbols that have been separated from their meanings, the facts don't mean any more” (Ewen in *The War You Don't See*, 2010). Thus, there can easily and simply be a link between Saddam and the 9/11 attacks, despite the fact that he did not have anything to do with it. In this documentary, Melvin Goodman, the former CIA analyst, explained how the news can be manipulated to shape public opinion. Moreover, David Rose, the former journalist of *The Observer*, wrote in one of his articles that he was ashamed about what he wrote. He declared: “the facts that I believed to be the truth, were not true. They were a pack of lies fed to me by a fairly sophisticated disinformation campaign” (Rose in *The War You Don't See*, 2010). Fran

Unsworth, BBC head of newsgathering, is another important figure who was interviewed by Pilger. When she was asked by Pilger whether the facts reported by BBC regarding the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq were not really facts, and whether it was the reporter's duty to find out the truth and transfer it to the public, she explained that this happened primarily because of lack of access to first hand reporting.<sup>135</sup> Secondly, "what BBC does or has as its duty, is to report what the government or their representatives saying, which of course BBC did". She continued: "we were reporting quite legitimately the claims that the people of the time were making, even if they weren't legitimate claims, they were in the mouth of legitimate leaders and we had the duty to report that" (Unsworth in *The War You Don't See*, 2010). The above example serves two simultaneous purposes. The first shows how politics are manipulated by the media in reflecting the war news; and the second focuses on the pivotal role of the media as a critic of government.

### **Iran and Islam in media and memoir**

The Islamic Republic and Islamic rituals have often been demonised in the media. According to Royston (2010), who has been living in the Middle East and has mingled with both sects of Muslims, everything about Islam reaches the "West" via the media:

Images of Islam reach the West via TV, YouTube and the print media - the Haj, Ashura and Ramadan. Historical and current events frame our picture of Islam - the Muslim conquests, the Golden Age, the Crusades, the fall of Constantinople, the Ottoman Court, and today, jihad, terrorism, the Taliban, veiled women, Iran, sectarian strife and Iraq. In the West, we fuel our paranoia by seizing upon messages of hatred rather than love (Royston, 2010).

Baker, Gabrielatos, and McEnery also note that: "the media control and filter information, selectively determining what Westerners learn about Islam" (2013, p. 17). Before the 1979 Revolution in Iran, most "Westerners" especially Americans had little or vague knowledge of the Middle East. The image of Islam in the news media was equal to the popular arts and stereotypes of the religion i.e. tantalising harems, tough punishments, oil and backwardness. Iran as a non-Arab country was lost in this hazy picture. Following the Islamic Revolution, the hostage crisis and Iran-Iraq war, the world attention was riveted to Iran mostly and it would not be much of an exaggeration to say that the Islamic world came to be known through Iran's affairs. In 1991, as mentioned in the introduction, Robin Wright, an expert on Islam and a senior advisor of the Bush administration, stated that the American government "has to be smarter in dealing with Islam than in dealing with communism 30 or 40 years ago" (Robin as cited in Said, 1997, p. 7). "The danger of simplifying a 'myriad of countries' was noted, but the only picture in the five column piece was of Ayatollah Khomeini. He and Iran,

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<sup>135</sup> Second-hand information, rather than day-to-day developments and eye-witness information can be a main source of biased reporting as the reporter is mostly relying on stereotypes.



embodied all that was objectionable about Islam, from terrorism and anti-Westernism” (p. 7). Also, as Baker, Gabrielatos & McEnery (2013) concluded in *Discourse Analysis and Media Attitudes*, the research has shown that the representation of Muslims and Islamic norms in the UK media for twelve years till 2009 “was predominantly carried out in a context of conflict, and the religion and its faithful were frequently portrayed as causes for concern, if not sources of threat” (p. 65).<sup>136</sup> Edward Said in his *Covering Islam* states that the Islam introduced by the media is a certain picture with a set of feelings that “goes with the over-all context” (1997, p. 47). According to Said, the media “are corporations serving and promoting a corporate identity – ‘America’ and even ‘the West’ - they all have the same central consensus in mind” (Said, 1997, p. 52). In Said’s opinion, although there is a vast variety of newspapers, TV, radios and news channels, “there is a qualitative and a quantitative tendency to favour certain views and certain representations of reality over others” (p. 49). In the case of Iran, the news is shaped with such a mentality in advance. Burke (2013) notes in *The Observer* that:

Our collective image of Iran and Iranians has been constructed by images that are almost always terrifying (the finger-waving bearded cleric addressing the crowd, the gun-toting extremist, the ranks of identical veiled women), by a small selection of high-profile and dramatic events involving animosity towards the West (the 1979-81 Tehran hostage crisis, the *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie of 1989, more recent “meddling” in Iraq) and by an evolving perception of immediate threat. (Burke in *The Observer*, 2013).

To this one should add that “a combination of a sustained policy of *Iran phobia* and demonization against the regime, and relentless unilateral and multilateral economic sanctions, has isolated and alienated Iran in its entirety” (Honarbin-Holliday, 2008, p. 6). This situation is not new. As discussed before, Shi’as have been historically victimised by both Muslims and non-Muslims. Symbolic in a similar way, after the event of the hostage crisis in Iran, almost every aspect of the history of Shi’a Islam appeared to be illogical or strange. According to Rizvi, in the study of Shi’ism, “the word misunderstood is not strong enough, rather it is an understatement. Not only is Shi’ism misunderstood, it has been ignored, misrepresented and studied mostly through the heresiographic literature of its opponents” (2007, p. 113). Modarresi<sup>137</sup> in his ‘World’s Biggest Pilgrimage Now Underway, And Why You’ve never Heard of it!’ writes about the world’s biggest gathering of Shi’as every year and the reason why this event has never been reflected in the media. He believes: “it probably has to do with

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<sup>136</sup> “It is notable that the term terror\* occurs more often than Islam\* in a corpus in which Islam\* was one of the search query terms” (Baker, Gabrielatos & McEnery, 2013, p. 65).

<sup>137</sup> Sayed Mahdi al-Modarresi (b. 1977) is a prominent Shi’a scholar who studied in the Islamic seminaries in Syria, Iran and Iraq. “He undertook his early academic education in the United States of America, finally studying sociology, politics, and philosophy at tertiary level in Australia” (modarresi.org, n.d.). He is famous for his English and Arabic speeches and articles. He is the author of *Say; He is God – Allah the God of Islam* and *Why Muslims Are Weird - And Some Downright Crazy!* Both of which are under publication.

the fact that the press is concerned more with negative, gory, and sensationalized tabloids, than with positive, inspiring narratives, particularly when it comes to Islam” (2014).<sup>138</sup> Said examines the case of Muharram, the month of grief and mourning for the martyrdom of the grandson of the Prophet, Imam Hossain, by some orientalist writers and journalists. In his example, Randy Daniels in *Nightly News* wrote a nonsensical statement about Muharram. He wrote that Muharram is a period for Shi’as in which they “celebrate Mohammed’s challenge to world leaders” (1997, p. 88). In another example, David Jarvis and Shekhar Bhatia in the *Sunday Express* (2010) in their article entitled “Muslims cut bodies for faith”, tried to explain the Muharram event that happened for the first time in Britain:

ISLAMIC fanatics are mutilating themselves at a British mosque in a bloody ceremony carried out only yards from a busy high street. Shi’a Muslims use a five-bladed chain called a Zanjeer to whip their own backs and make cuts in their foreheads with razor blades in homage to their faith. Bare-chested men were left bleeding heavily during the ritual known as Matam – self-flagellation – which a witness described as being “like a scene from a horror film”. The Sunday Express found that up to 800 men performed the bloody ceremony in secret at the Imamia Mosque in Forest Gate, East London, last year. The Matam takes place during the annual Shi’a Ashura ceremony and commemorates the death of Hossain, a grandson of the prophet Muhammad. It is practised largely in Pakistan, Iran, Iraq and India as well as Yemen and Afghanistan but this is the first time it is known to have taken place in Britain. Huge wooden screens were put up around the mosque to keep the event secret and prevent passers-by on busy Romford Road seeing the bloodletting (Jarvis & Bhatia, 2010).

The Ashura and *azadari* (religious mourning) were witnessed by an English man who then interpreted it as a horror movie. He said: “I was told it was part of a religious ceremony but the anti-Western sentiment was clear. If the public had seen what was going on they would have reported it to the police. It was a scene from a horror film” (Jarvis & Bhatia, 2010). How this religious programme looked like a horror film is not mentioned. Interestingly, at the end of this description, the writers mentioned that: “Newham Council said it had no knowledge of the *Matam* taking place and the Ministry of Justice said self-flagellation was not an offence” (Jarvis, Bhatia, 2010). According to Sardar (1999), “a discussion of what happened in the past is also an attempt at representing the past” (p. 54). Personal representations are biased to some degree and thus can come to make orientalism possible. Needless to say that “bias comes especially in the questions one poses and in the type of category one uses, where indeed, bias is especially hard to track down because it is hard to suspect the very terms one uses, which

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<sup>138</sup> Modarresi continued: “If a few hundred anti-immigration protestors take to the streets in London and they will make headlines... The same level of airtime is awarded to a pro-democracy march in Hong Kong or an anti-Putin rally in Russia... But a gathering of twenty million in obstreperous defiance of terror and injustice somehow fails even to make it into the TV news ticker! An unofficial media embargo is imposed on the gargantuan event despite the story having all the critical elements of an eye-catching feature; the staggering numbers, the political significance, the revolutionary message, the tense backdrop, as well as originality. But when such a story does make it through the editorial axe of major news outlets, it creates shockwaves and touches the most random people” (2014).

seem so innocently neutral” (Hodgson, 1974, p. 27). The events may have not been omitted or even distorted, but not being analysed properly can also lead to misinformation. Given the thematic focus on essentialist representations of Islamic rituals by media or orientalists, I hereby examine the depiction of Iranian culture and Islamic rituals by diaspora Iranians to explore how these works contribute to a broader understanding of Islam and Iran.

On the basis of what discussed in the previous sections on autobiography, *Persepolis* is presented by “Western readership” as authoritative. In *Persepolis* in the chapter “The Key” Satrapi asserts that: “hitting yourself is one of the country’s rituals. During certain religious ceremonies, some people flagellated themselves brutally. Sometimes even with chains. It could go very far. Sometimes it was considered a Macho thing” (Satrapi, 2003, p. 96). By “it could go very far”, she is actually referring to the issue of *qame zani*,<sup>139</sup> an act of mourning for the martyrdom of the grandson of the Prophet on the day of Ashura (10<sup>th</sup> day of Muharram, the first month in the Islamic calendar). This includes striking the head with a sword in remembrance of what happened to Imam Hossain and his companions on the day of Ashura. Out of context and with no former background for non-Muslims, such rituals are likely be dreadful and horrifying, and just illustrate the unreasonable extremism. However, considered in the proper cultural and religious context, they might not seem as such. It is noticeable that a large number of Shi’a *olama*<sup>140</sup> have forbidden the act of *qame zani* as it is likely that those practising it will hurt themselves, and might lead to loss of life and create instability in religion. According to Sardar, “there is an obligation to state Muslim beliefs and views in their ‘entirety so fully and clearly as to leave no room for complaint of misinterpretation’” (Sardar, 1999, pp. 56-57). One should possess proper knowledge and skill to decipher the Islamic documents and “integrate the material culled therefrom into an historical contribution in the accepted professional sense” (Tibawi as cited in Sardar, 1999, p. 56). Barzegar, in her *Persepolis and Orientalism*, stated that Ashura and its related rituals - beating the chest, chaining the back and even *qame zani* - “can be compared to some Catholic religious practices” (2012, p. 42) and

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<sup>139</sup> *Tatbir* or *qame zani* is a mortification ritual practised by some Shi’as on the tenth day of Muharram in commemoration of the third Imam of Shi’as, “which consists of making an incision in the crown of the head, and as they walk along, beating it with their hands or the flat part of a sword to make the blood flow” (Mervin, 2007, p. 139). “Some Shiite clerics forbid the *tatbir*, because they consider it self-damage (*darar*) and *haram* in Islam. Hizbullah does not allow his members to practice the *tatbir*, because Khomeini, and later Khamenei, forbade it” (Mervin, 2007, p. 146).

<sup>140</sup> For example, the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has announced that *tatbir* is a wrong action. “Of course some forms of mourning are unacceptable. For instance, ‘*qame zani*’ [a religiously prohibited ritual in which people cut their foreheads] has been declared *haram*, and it must not be practiced. That is because *qame zani* will make the enemies more insolent and will give them an advantage over those who love the members of the Holy Prophet’s household. But the common mourning rituals can increasingly strengthen one’s emotional connection to the infallible Imams. These rituals are very good. *Tatbir* [*qame zani*] is a fabricated tradition. It is among the issues that do not belong to the religion and undoubtedly God is not also pleased with such a practice” Said Khamenei (2009).

therefore is nothing rare nor new from a religious point of view. As mentioned earlier in this research, Ashura is rooted in a dispute following the split between Shi'a and Sunni Islam and therefore is of great importance to the followers of *Ahlulbayt*, the progeny of the Prophet. According to Barzegar, "such rituals are not practiced for male confirmation, but have a much more devout, religious meaning that is not shared only by the male gender, but is practiced by women as well" (2012, p. 43). In a similar way, Axworthy compares the Muharram funeral processions to "traditional Good Friday processions in many Catholic countries" (2013, p. 23). He later states:

The Ashura processions in particular made a template for the public expression of collective solidarity and moral feeling that was significant in the revolution - as well as reinforcing the common understanding among all classes of Shi'a beliefs about the Emams. The processions reconfirmed and reinforced ideas about the arrogance and corruption of power and wealth, and the virtue of modesty and poverty, that run deep in Shi'ism and in Islam more generally (p. 24).

Likewise, Steve Royson (2010), an English writer of the *MidEast Posts*, comments on the Shi'a rituals which he observed in Bahrain during Muharram. He describes the mass marches on the day of Ashura in Bahrain, a country with a population which is nearly 65% Shi'a. Royston's account of religious ceremony although he is a "Westerner" and a non-Muslim - seems to be realistic and positive. His point of view towards Shi'a rituals is a respectful look at differences in people's beliefs. Even though he is not a Shi'a and has never observed the mournful scene of the ceremony before, he abstained from presenting a stereotypical representation of Ashura. As Jonas Slaats (2007), the author of *Yunus News*, argues: the bias or subjectivity is inevitably creeping into media reports, however, responsible media should be aware of the "limit to what is inevitable. It is, for example, not allowed to invent or distort facts or to take them so much out of context that they are doomed to give a wrong idea to the public" (Slaats, 2007). In this article, Slaats reflects upon the Ashura ceremony and its representation in BBC and CNN reports. By stating the way this religious ritual has been portrayed in the media, Slaats condemns the BBC's choice of words for describing this Islamic ceremony. He believes that the linguistic technique which the BBC used to represent Ashura is absolutely wrong from an ethical and journalistic point of view (2007). He then asserted that "there is no real excuse" for such wording, even if it was just a misplacement.

Through ignorance and prejudice, Islam is 'demonized' and 'barbarized' enough all over the world. We do not need the media to add to that any further. [...] but to simply copy-paste information about a ritual, without really checking or contextualizing it, certainly in such sensitive issues, is plain wrong from both a journalistic and an ethical point of view (Slaats, 2007 as cited in Barzegar, 2012, p. 46).

Arguably, the worldwide negative reception of Islamic rituals represented in *Persepolis* depends upon the fear of Islam as an unfamiliar and exotic culture; especially because of the fact that Satrapi, due to her personal account, was not able to provide her non-Muslim audiences with the full historical, cultural and religious background. According to Alexandra Kitty (2005):

The less we know about a group, the more mysterious, unpredictable and dangerous they seem. We don't know their weaknesses, their fears or even their humanity and kindness. [...] because we don't have enough information to make a decision, it just seems safer to hate and fear outsiders (p. 123).

In Satrapi's case, it could be said that she left Iran because she could not live as an individual and support the regime which she believed had restricted her individuality. As a "Western" educated and a member of elite upper-class, Satrapi's lifestyle contrasts that of the majority of Iranians. Her secular lifestyle fits the "Western" individuality and freedom which is in contradiction with solidarity and fraternity of Muslim communities. Her royal family has never lived according to the rules of Islamic social and moral norms. According to Theodore Gabriel, the notion of *ummah* exists at different levels in an Islamic community (Gabriel, 2004, p. 15). This not only refers to the whole nation but to any group such as a family or a village at smaller levels. What is important is the group not just the individual. This can be referred to another sharp contrast between the "Western" and Islamic countries. In the case of Iran, religion is the foundation of society and the social rules and orders are derived from the context of the sacred texts. Religion and state are hand in hand in almost all aspects of life. The separation of the two is explained in Iran as the propaganda of the enemies of Islam, namely imperialists and orientalist.<sup>141</sup> The imperialists according to Khomeini began their "penetration of the Muslim countries about three hundred years ago, and they regarded it as necessary to work for the extirpation of Islam in order to attain their ultimate goals" (1970, p. 7). In general, the apprehension of some Muslims to the idea of individuality or separation of politics from Islam might be owing to the fact that they believe "their traditions and values can be infected by Western individualism and liberalism and thus jeopardised. Western culture is therefore commonly seen to be a threat to the Islamic way of life and a force that erodes [...] social norms of Islam" (Gabriel, 2004, p. 16). As Khomeini put it, Islam is not just limited to individual stances or needs; rather, it is the political and social aspects of Islam that determine the destiny of a nation and will guarantee the *omat-e Islami's* salvation. The rules and

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<sup>141</sup> Islam is the religion of anti-imperialism. The nature of Islam is based on freedom and independence but the imperialists with the help of orientalist are trying to make Muslims dependent upon them (Khomeini, 1970, p. 14). In Khomeini's words, "they felt that the major obstacle in the path of their materialistic ambitions and the chief threat to their political power was nothing but Islam and its ordinances, and the belief of the people in Islam. They therefore plotted and campaigned against Islam by various means" (Khomeini, 1970, p. 7).

regulations set by Islam are intended to design a holistic way of life for every individual in the community of believers. The *hejab* issues, as will be discussed in the following chapter, have many political, anti-imperial and anti-colonial implications, and also national significance inside Iran. To many Muslim Iranian women, the veil has an “anti-Western” capacity in its nature. The *hejab* is also looked at as the main barrier to the corruption of the nation and its political and cultural dependence. It is considered as a “social vaccination of [women’s] purity and virtuousness” against sickness of imperialist penetration; “As vaccinations are compulsory for the sake of public health, so veiling is enforced and is not a matter of individual choice” (Haddad & Esposito, 1998, p. 61). The “Islamic dress is also used as a sign of protest and liberation. It has developed political overtones, becoming a source of national pride as well as resistance to Western” (cultural as well as political) dominance and to authoritarian regimes (Esposito, 2002, p. 132). From this point of view, disregarding the rule would foster further imperialist or orientalist discourses about religion in Iran.

### **Conclusion**

Whilst providing an historical overview focusing on the relationships between the religious leadership and political authority in pre and post-revolutionary Iran, this chapter explored the attitudes towards democracy at a global, Islamic and Iranian level, assessing how these attitudes give rise to different interpretations of human rights. As argued, democracies range from liberal to social and can be very collective or individual oriented. Different regimes can be considered differently democratic as long as they stretch between these two extremes. Therefore, there is no fixed definition or position for democracy. Based on the general common features of democracy discussed so far, democracy and non-democracy are distinguishable on the account of the conditions of coming to power and being accountable for the actions of those in power. The Iranian system with its unique definition of *velayat-e faqih* and application of *shura* and different elected bodies can still be considered a democracy as long as it is within the above mentioned extremes.

Analysis of Satrapi’s views suggested that her perception of democracy focuses on the substantial body of a universal definition of human rights. However, as Namli critiques the monopoly of liberal, individual and universal understanding of human rights, both democracy and human rights must be defined in a social, political and national framework and therefore must be contextualised. This is quite necessary to reject the monopoly of liberal individualism as a colonial legacy. The concept of human rights itself suggests complexity, pluralism, contextual evaluation and interpretation far from an absolute fixed framework or a positive law. In this regard, Satrapi’s concept of human rights which is based on individual freedom and “Western” liberalism seems to contradict her *intentio auctoris* which is very much inclusive in nature and is the main source of her dissatisfaction with feminist circles. As

discussed in the introduction, Satrapi's rejection of being a feminist and her claims over democracy's failure in both Iran and the "West" is in line with her *intentio auctoris*, while her belief in individuality seems to contradict her *intentio auctoris*. According to Namli, there is no international universal concept of human rights and the secular, liberal and individual concept of human rights is a wrong reductionist approach. Religion as well as politics are inevitable in any legitimate discourse on human rights.

Namli's argument can be applied to the dynamic nature of democracy. In an ideal model, democracy is largely based on the notions of basic human rights, equality and individual freedom (Blaug and Schwarzmantel, 2004, p. 4). However, according to Blaug and Schwarzmantel "in a new millennium it is more difficult than ever to put into practice the core values of democratic theory, even assuming there could be agreement on what they are" (2004, p. 2). In terms of investigating the compatibility of democracy with Islam, one should be aware of the fact that the democratic ideals should not merely be considered as "a product of a particular civilisation, that of Western Europe and North America, one which commands no validity in other cultures, say those of Islam" (Blaug and Schwarzmantel, 2004, p. 4). The fact is that democratic values are not confined to certain cultures. In a democratic system, differences and multiculturalism are to be respected. Democracy, according to Blaug and Schwarzmantel, "may be based on certain values, of secularism and willingness (and ability) to compromise, which in turn depend on a particular history and set of social conditions which suit Western society" but is definitely not practical in other parts of the world today i.e. the Middle East (2004, p. 5).

Consequently, human rights just like democracy cannot and should not have a fixed definition and the need to contextualisation seems quite necessary in understanding and justification of human rights in different contexts. Moreover, Satrapi's individuality is the one that is not appreciated by the Islamic Republic which is more public oriented. In such a context, one would not expect Satrapi or others to support a regime which they believe has limited their individuality. This will justify Satrapi's representations of Islamic rituals in Iran in almost the same way as the orientalist accounts, although she repeatedly announced her dissatisfaction with the biased media representations and journalistic reports on Iran, there is a tension in her approach. While her *intentio auctoris* attempts to be nuanced, her depiction of Shia rituals plays into the agendas of some of her "Western" readers.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REPRESENTATIONS OF THE HEJAB IN AND BEYOND PERSEPOLIS

#### Introduction

In the opening chapter of *Persepolis*, “The Veil”, Satrapi presents the Iranian policies of the *hejab*. “The Veil”, in addition to being the first chapter of her graphic novel (2003, pp. 3-9), is the title of another chapter in the second part of the book (Satrapi, 2003, pp. 233-245). The first page begins with a primary school picture of Satrapi in 1980. Little Marji<sup>142</sup> wears a veil just like all her classmates. One cannot see Satrapi (“You don’t see me”); She is only partially visible at the far left of this picture until she notes that “this is me” (Satrapi, 2003, p. 3). In this first frame, Satrapi depicts herself as “fragmented, cut, disembodied, and divided between frames. [This] indicates the psychological condition suggested by the chapter’s title, ‘The Veil’” (Chute, 2008, p. 96). Satrapi says that she did not really like to wear the veil as she did not understand why she had to do so (2003, p. 3). In *The Guardian* (2003), Satrapi wrote: “I have worn a *hijab*, and it was a question of survival. When I was 10 the revolution happened in Iran, where I lived, and from that point I was forced to wear the veil. If I hadn’t done it, I would have been jailed” (Satrapi in *The Guardian*, 2003). The arrangement of *Persepolis* clearly confirms its author’s concerns. The imposition of the *hejab* as an Islamic rule applied by the Iranian government is one of Satrapi’s main concerns in *Persepolis*. The debate on the *hejab* is neither new nor unique to *Persepolis*. The veil, in Islam, is generally a continued discourse initiated with the projection of “Western” system of citizenship and rights on Muslim societies in general while focusing on the oppression of women by Muslim men (Nash, 2012, p. 50). There are numerous examples of the *hejab* in *Persepolis* as the sign of Satrapi’s oppression, segregation and subordination as a woman in the ‘patriarchal’ society of Iran. For example, upon her return to Iran or when studying at the university in Tehran, she condemns the restrictions applied to women in terms of their outfits while men remained relatively free (Satrapi, 2003, p. 298).

The author of *Persepolis* openly criticises the totalitarianism of the Iranian Islamic regime and discusses the veil as the symbol of the oppression of women. Satrapi’s *Persepolis* is largely represented by *intentio lectoris* as “the autobiographical story of living under the repressive Iranian government” (Mpottash, 2008). According to Tully, Satrapi’s agenda has the outspoken aim of signalling to a “Western and non-Iranian audience” the problem of women’s oppression under the current Islamic government (Satrapi in Tully, 2004). The veil

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<sup>142</sup> “Throughout Satrapi’s narrative, the protagonist is a child (the young Marjane, called Marji)” (Chute, 2008, p. 94).



seems to be unequivocally associated to darkness, just like the narrow-minds of those who support its implementation. This association is rendered in an exemplary manner by a series of highly evocative vignettes in which fully veiled women shout their support for the *hejab* with closed eyes (Satrapi, 2003, p. 60). It seems as if, in Mahmood's words, their participation in the demonstration for the veil are "more prone to inculcating mindless and habitual submission to authority" in Iran (Mahmood, 2011, p. 83). Also, Satrapi's awareness of gender inequality and elaborating on feminist agendas led to confirm her position as a feminist, which she clearly denies to be. Moving from this premise, I will explain the irreconcilable differences between Satrapi's *intentio auctoris* and that of the *intentio lectoris* i.e. "Western" media and the Islamic Republic.

In an interview with *Asia Society*, she declares that her position towards the *hejab* is a dual one and what she actually opposes is the language of force not the idea of veiling itself (Satrapi in Shaikh, *Asia Society*, n.d.). According to her public declarations, the veil is an instrument of rebellion for Satrapi,<sup>143</sup> and often aids her in this rebellion. At times, even while wearing the veil, she rebels against other societal restrictions (Mpottash, 2008). Frequently, Satrapi mentioned: "I really believe in a society where if someone wants to walk in the street completely naked they will be able to, and if someone wants to wear a veil they will also be able to" (Satrapi in Hattenstone, 2008). The goal of the current chapter is to create an informed discussion regarding Satrapi's dual position towards the *hejab*- she is against the ideology of imposition and/or banishment of the *hejab*- while her ideology has been used merely as the representation of Iran as a patriarchal and "fundamentalist" nation. My argument thus revolves around the establishment and confirmation of these orientalist representations and Satrapi's dissatisfaction with the current representation of Iran as a terrorist nation or her work as a feminist art. This chapter is an attempt to analyse Satrapi's position towards the *hejab* along with her *intentio auctoris* to challenge the stereotypes set against her country.

In light of the above, I will discuss how a simplistic reading of 'the veil' has contributed to the perpetration of clichés by means of a campaign constructed against the *hejab*, which frames it as a symbol for women's oppression. According to Hirschkind and Mahmoud (2002): "The veil has been freighted with so many meanings in contemporary social and political conflicts that any ascription of a singular meaning to it – such as a 'symbol of women's oppression' - is unconvincing" (p. 352). It so emerges that the *hejab* is not just a piece of cloth for covering women's hair. It is (and as I will show, always has been) a political signifier, especially in Iran. Jennifer Heath, in her recent study on Iranian women writers, noted that: "The social meanings of head coverings worldwide are as diverse as the cultures they come from. In Iran,

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<sup>143</sup> In one of her interviews with *The Guardian* (2003), Satrapi said that wearing the veil in Iran was a symbol of rebellion for her.

the social meaning of the veil is a contested one and continues to be the subject of religious and political disputes” (2008, p. 252). For many, the veil carries different connotations. It could range from repression and patriarchal fundamentalist Islamism to adherence to the sacred laws of Islam.

In the final section of this chapter, the social meaning of the *hejab* in Iran as defined by the Islamic Republic would be useful in considering Satrapi’s concerns. The *hejab* rules in Iran are shaped by ethos that privilege communal health over individual liberty. The outspoken rationale of the contemporary government in Iran is to implement a public ethos, i.e. a way to protect (the women of) a minority faith community, as well as all other Islamic values in a community that has historically shaped its identity on notions of resistance and struggle against the threats posed by orientalist and imperialists.<sup>144</sup> The community ethos set by the government in Iran is argued (by Iranian officials) to establish a social order,<sup>145</sup> that is beneficial to everyone. Therefore, the commitment of the government to Shi’a Islam is not just to legitimise the power and authority of ruling system, but to keep this social order in place and to help solve social problems with reference to the Qur’an and *ahadith*. The current policies of the *hejab* are thus a way to enforce an historical notion of community identity<sup>146</sup> in Iran, and to give Iranian women the freedom to be functional social beings inside the *omat-e Islami*.<sup>147</sup> Needless to mention that, these are the views of *olama* and public officials to justify their policies. Satrapi’s concern in terms of the *hejab* originates from her individuality which is rooted in her “Western” upper-class secular background (which is different from those of the majority of Iranians and the government) as well as her belief in “freedom” and “choice” over women’s body and clothing.

### **An introduction to other memoirs**

Satrapi is not an isolated case in this research. In contemporary Iran, many intellectuals share the same views on Iranian policies, especially as far as women’s issues are concerned

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<sup>144</sup> This is confirmed by Sedghi, “The *hijab* (cover or modesty) and reveiling became one of the most pervasive symbols of the revolution, standing for Islamism, anti-imperialism and anti-Westernism” (Sedghi, 2007, p. 199).

<sup>145</sup> The *hejab* “fosters social order by regulating women’s sexuality [...] veiling guarded Islam, but significantly, it hid women’s sexual power/energy from eliciting public disorder by distracting and arousing men sexually”. Also, the *hejab* “is an institution with its own set of rules regarding women’s conduct and their actions and interactions, in particular with men” (Sedghi, 2007, pp. 212-213).

<sup>146</sup> “Veiling is believed to signify the identity of the nation, and of Islamic society, fighting against the West for independence” (Semati, 2008, p. 219).

<sup>147</sup> See Bullock’s debate on the *hejab*, which relies on interviews with a group of Muslim women to discover the meaning of the *hejab* and also “to add a perspective that has hitherto been marginalised, namely the point of view of the believer” (2002, p. xxix). In her *Rethinking Muslim Women and the veil*, Bullock presents the ideas of a group of women who believe that the *hejab* means “to give back to women ultimate control of their own bodies”, and “to give them freedom from constant attention to the physical self”. It “is one of the most fundamental aspects of female empowerment” (2002, pp. 184-185).

and have expressed them in best-selling memoirs. Just like Satrapi, they live as exiles/expatriates in Western Europe or the USA after being expelled from or leaving Iran. The three authors I will discuss in this chapter are: Betty Mahmoody's *Not without My Daughter*,<sup>148</sup> 1987 (b. 1947, Alma, Michigan); Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, 2003 (b. 1955, Tehran); and Shirin Ebadi's *Iran Awakening*, 2007 (b. 1947, Hamadan). The rationale of this choice is based upon the popularity of their memoirs, their condemnation of Iran, the historical period they all represent, i.e. the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution, and finally their ostracism from Iran. Further to that, such narratives are personal stories of women whose traumatic experiences in revolutionary Iran are turned into the possibility to give voice to individualist claims of agency in a country, where the idea itself of personal freedom is one subordinate to Islamic social obligations. Just like Satrapi, their dramatic experiences have influenced an increasingly popular genre, thus providing the background for a new consolidated trend in contemporary literature, i.e. the courageous independent woman resisting Islamic oppression. Although there are several similarities i.e. the role played by the *hejab* policies and, in general, gender inequality is central to most discourses between the aforementioned works, Satrapi's intention stands out as unique.<sup>149</sup> A comparative literary analysis of *Persepolis* and the works of Mahmoody, Ebadi and Nafisi – I argue – will provide the empirical terrain for a more nuanced discourse on Satrapi's intention, and contemporary representations of *Persepolis* in terms of gender, the *hejab*, Iran and the Islamic Republic.

### **Not without My Daughter, 1987**

An American citizen who was married to an Iranian doctor, Betty Mahmoody narrates her short sojourn in Iran soon after the Islamic Revolution. The story begins when Betty, her husband, Sayed Bozorg Mahmoody (1939-2009), and their little daughter Mahtob leave US for a short vacation in Iran. Back then, Iranian society was facing a difficult time, being just out of the revolution and in the middle of the Iran-Iraq war. After two weeks in Iran, Bozorg ("Moody") reveals to Betty that he has lost his job in the USA. He therefore wishes to stay in Iran and help his country during the war. Betty disagrees and insists on going back home. After a series of dramatic experiences and the quite likely possibility of being separated from Mahtob, the protagonist manages to escape with her little daughter, and to reach the US embassy in Turkey. Upon her return to America, Betty obtains a divorce from her husband.

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<sup>148</sup> Betty Mahmoody's *Not without My Daughter* (1987), though antecedent to all the other memoirs, is different. The author is an American citizen whose position is that of an outsider with privileged knowledge.

<sup>149</sup> As mentioned before, she has declared on a number of occasions, including upon acceptance of major awards, that *Persepolis* is dedicated to all Iranians and that her graphic novel is a 'love letter to Iran'. In other words, Satrapi is proud of being Iranian, and loves Iran.

She meets William Hoffer who helps her to write her memoir. Betty Mahmoody has since become a public speaker, and is the president and co-founder of One World for Children, a NGO that offers protection to children of bi-cultural marriages.

*Not without My Daughter* was released in a time in which Iran faced the toughest period in its history, i.e. after the 1979 Iran hostage crisis, the sanctioning of an international embargo, the war with Iraq, the 1983 Hezbollah bombings and the 1986 Iran-Contra Affair. None of these affairs have been easy or without any costs for Iran. Its launch and – just like *Persepolis* – its successive rendering into a movie, occurred in 1991, after the 1988 US launch of an Operation Praying Mantis against Iran and the shooting down of Iranian Airbus A300B2 in Iranian airspace by the US Navy. Such events have accustomed “Western” readers to the public slandering of Iran. These are inevitably built on traumatic personal narratives that reduce complex political and cultural situations into basic structural opposites such as, for instance, freedom and oppression, religion and fanaticism, man and woman, etc. Dramatic events that Mahmoody experienced had a major impact on the emotional and material life of the author. The common language of Mahmoody is rooted in the anxious reaction to personal experiences of oppression and abuse, the Islamic Revolution generates anti-Islamic sentiments. Mahmoody is concerned with phenomena of gendered discrimination and/or oppression in Iran. The only means of liberation she envisages is one that annihilates the values of Iran and aggressively dismisses its culture. Some critics believe that the book is a way to deliver not just Mahmoody’s concerns, but also seems designed to reinforce negative perceptions of Iran among “Western” readers. According to Bahramitash, “The book helped to incite anti-Iranian feelings across Europe and North America and, in the aftermath of 11 September, when this genre was gaining new momentum” (2005, p. 227). This can be evinced from its recent (i.e. post-9/11) edition, where a woman wearing a black *niqab* occupies the whole cover. While veiling (the *hejab*) is compulsory in Iran, the *burqa* or *niqab* is an Arab garment that is not popular in Iran. Mahmoody herself gives a completely different description of the Iranian veil: “a *chador*<sup>150</sup> is a large, half-moon-shaped cloth entwined around the shoulders, forehead, and chin to reveal only eyes, nose and mouth” (Mahmoody, 1998, p. 5).

The global advertisement of the book and the movie which speaks with the language of essential views, i.e. the *hejab* equals oppression, can easily promote orientalist stereotypes. Freedom and liberty for Muslim women, and the quest for gender equality, have become the

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<sup>150</sup> In Iran, *chador* is the most popular women’s choice of *the hejab*, especially among highly religious ladies. Further to that, Mahmoody continues: “What intrigued me most was that the *chador* was optional. There were other garments available to fulfil the harsh requirements of the dress code, but these Muslim women chose to wear the *chador* on top of everything else, despite the oppressive heat. I marvelled at the power their society and their religion held over them” (Mahmoody, 1998, p. 5).

core argument in many agendas. Keddie observes that nineteenth and early twentieth century “Western” stereotypes of Muslim women term them “as little better than slaves, either totally repressed or erotic objects, and as needing Western control or tutelage to gain any rights” (p. 52). Talking about the “Western” stereotypes of Muslim women, Keddie claims that “many Westerners see women’s bad conditions as stemming directly from Islam” (Keddie, as cited in Nash, 2012, p. 52). According to Kandiyoti, “orientalist depictions of subjugated women entrapped in the fast-frozen relations of an atemporal Islam still persisted” (as cited in Nash, 2012, p. 52). In Bahramitash’s words, books like *Not without My Daughter*, with the image of Muslim women as victims of Islamic tradition, are examples of “feminist Orientalism” (2005, p. 221). One of the significant characteristic of this type of orientalism, which is neither new nor rare, is that “it regards Oriental women only as victims and not as agents of social transformation; thus it is blind to the ways in which women in the “East” resist and empower themselves. Therefore Muslim women need saviours, i.e., their Western sisters” (2005, p. 222). According to many feminists, “this book has hijacked the issue of women’s rights from them, and it helps to prepare broad acceptance for the neo-conservatives’ Greater Middle East Initiative agenda- a Middle East dominated by US economic and political interests” (Bahramitash, 2005, p. 234). The possibility of military confrontation against Iran, Bahramitash argues, is inspired through publication of such books. Thus, “the situation calls for a reconsideration of the reasons why gender rights advocacy, anti-war activism, and anti-racism have failed to come together in this case” (Bahramitash, 2005, p. 234).

### **Reading Lolita in Tehran, 2003**

This book is the memoir of a lecturer of English in a major university in Tehran. The experiences of Azar Nafisi, and the challenges she had to go through with the success of the Islamic Revolution, have resulted in an outspoken attack directed towards an aggressive patriarchal society. The book conferred immediate success on Nafisi (by then living in the USA), and cemented her reputation as one of the most influential authors and public speakers. *Reading Lolita in Tehran* remained in *The New York Times* bestseller list for more than 117 weeks. It has been translated into thirty-two languages and has won major literary awards. As Mahmood states, Nafisi’s book “has also been promoted as a cultural icon by corporations eager to showcase their socially responsible side” (Mahmood, 2011, p. 87). For example, Nafisi’s appeared in automobile advertisements for the Audi car manufacturers, who sold their brands to many “affluent and educated potential buyers as a part of ‘Audi of America’s Never Follow Campaign’” thus, revealing their concerns over the situation of Muslim women that “has been evacuated of critical content and whittled down to a commodified token of elite chic” (Mahmood, 2011, p. 88). According to Bahramitash, *Reading Lolita in Tehran* became

a major success “because it is regarded as a book that supports the women’s cause. But it is infused with feminist Orientalism” (2005, p. 230).

From the very beginning of her book, Nafisi shows her discontent with the Islamic Revolution, and the limits imposed on her professional life by public policies derived from religious dogma. Opposition to the regime in Nafisi’s words has made her name (2007, p. 181). Her analysis is conducted through a comparative study of literature selected as symbolic of the endemic problems of Iran. Moving from Nabokov’s *Invitation to a Beheading* (Russian edition 1935-1936; English edition 1959) and *Lolita* (1955), Nafisi reflects on her traumatic experiences caused by criticising the Islamic Republic and religious dogmatism. “Provocatively re writing Austen, she angles her satire against the mullahs: ‘It is a truth universally acknowledged that a Muslim man, regardless of his fortune, must be in want of a nine-year-old-virgin wife’” (Nash, 2012, p. 57). Nafisi associates the “Ayatollah’s victory” and “implementation of Islamic” dogmas with anti-human practices within Iranian society (Nash, 2012, p. 57). Although Nafisi has said that she neither considers the character of Lolita to be the epitome of Iranian women, nor intends the book to be a metaphor for the Islamic Republic, however, according to Keshavarz, every episode of Nabokov’s *Lolita* is tied in with the lives of Iranians, especially women, and “sometimes the readings are sidestepped entirely and replaced with the author’s personal observations on the Revolution or on extended political commentary” (2007, p. 17). The pessimistic tone of Nabokov’s novels suits Nafisi’s agenda, i.e. an open critique of the new Islamic Republic of Iran and its Islamic ethos. Nabokov’s narratives serve a twofold purpose of giving voice to dissatisfaction with politics and towards Islamic rules, especially in matters of gender and the issue of veiling in Iran. The public policies of the Iranian government, she argues, have enforced a strict set of laws that have contributed to subjugating vulnerable people, chiefly women. She thus advocates individualism as the *sine qua non* of women’s freedom and emancipation, and her objections toward public policies criticise a system whose rationale is entirely built on the social construction of *umat-e Islami* (the community of believers). This is exemplified by means of a detailed exemplification of various restrictions, however trivial, imposed by the Iranian government:

The joy of teaching was marred by diversion and considerations forced on us by the regime - how well could one teach when the main concern of university was not the quality of one’s work but the colour of one’s lips, the subversive potential of a single strand of hair? (Nafisi, 2004, p. 11).

Her response to such humiliation “is mediated through literary discussions of the novels of Nabokov, Fitzgerald, James and Austen” (Nash, 2012, p. 57). This is confirmed in Mahmood’s analysis:

She [Nafisi] paints a stultifying picture of life in post-revolutionary Iran – a life devoid of any beauty, colour, inspiration, poetry, debate, discussion, and public argumentation. In this suffocating environment, it is only the Western literary canon that offers any hope of redemption in its irrepressible power to foment rebellion and critique and its intrinsic capacity to incite critical self-reflection (Mahmood, 2011, p. 85).

For Nafisi, the literary texts became a means “of exposing the ‘false dreams’ of totalitarianism” (Nash, 2012, p. 58). Along with other post-revolutionary memoirs, Nafisi’s literary work represents the “dominant metaphors” of her time (Talattof as cited in Nash, 2012, p. 58). According to Talattof, this mode of reading is a desired way for promoting subjectivity among readers and perfect enough to interpret a text, “and establish a set of criteria for evaluating literature. Such an enterprise shapes the readers’ literary tastes and teaches them to value political meaning rather than literary form” (Talatoff, 2000, pp. 15-16).

Unlike Mahmood, who is neither an Iranian nor an intellectual or artist, Nafisi’s stances have the benefit of the authority of a woman who is a native Iranian (i.e. with “insider’s knowledge”), an esteemed lecturer and an affirmed writer educated in “Western” institutions (Swiss and American universities). Therefore, because of her “insider knowledge”, the reader is led to sympathise with the author’s feeling when she learns that the career of an independent and bright woman, though a promising one, was stopped by the public policies of the Islamic Republic when she finally decided to give up and resign in 1995. According to Marandi, “from political as well as literary perspectives, [...] memoirs are widely regarded as truthful representations of Iran in the Western media and among many Western intellectuals who are considered to be experts on Iran” (Marandi, 2009, p. 24). Their success depends in vast measure on the nature, i.e. first-hand personal narratives built on “true” events. Usually, he continues, they reflect, in emotional terms, on traumatic experiences perpetrated by the Iranian government through its policies. These works – irrespective of their actual motivations – legitimise the perspective that Islam is indeed an oppressor of women. Even more radically, Marandi refers to such writers as “captive minds,” “brown sahibs,” or what Malcolm X would call the “house Negro” (Marandi, 2009, p. 23). Nash argues that the narrative techniques used by post-revolutionary memoir writers in discussions of gender policies - notably veiling issues - in Iran have used a similar language to that of the orientalist. Their language, whether fictional, critical or revivalist, is identifiable with hegemonic feminist discourses, values and culture, and consequently it is not entirely compatible with revolutionary Islamic viewpoints. In his words, “the fault-line between Islam and the West is often articulated by the projection of the Western discourse of rights on to Muslim societies” (Nash, 2012, p. 50). Dabashi also believes the hegemonic nature of these works does not let the “native informer” speak within her local culture (Dabashi, 2006). According to Dabashi, the neo orientalist writer tends to describe the problems of a sector of the population (here, most Iranian women) from a superior

viewpoint (This fits Satrapi and other's background; that is, liberal, wealthy and upper middle class). It continues presenting the disadvantaged women on the basis of the fact that they cannot be represented. In fact, this group, in this case the majority of Iranian women, has been presented in terms of:

[...] their feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and [their] being 'Third World' (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimised, etc.) in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, as modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities and the freedom to make their own decisions (Mohanty, 2007, p. 22).

The accusation of neo orientalism against *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, just like in the case of Mahmoody's *Not without My Daughter* finds its confirmation in terms of the commercial issues. For example, Nafisi's book cover shows two young college students looking with marvel and enthusiasm at a piece of writing with their scarves improperly fixed. Dabashi states that the use of this image is an "iconic burglary from the press, distorted and staged in a frame for an entirely different purpose than when it was taken" (2006, p. 7).<sup>151</sup> The orientalist cliché is further charged by the ambiguity emerging from the public presentation of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. The book cover places the two young ladies in the context of "Nabokov's celebrated novel about paedophilia", and thus "re-enacts an old orientalist fantasy about the incestuous character of the East, simultaneously repulsive and tantalizing in its essence" (Mahmood, 2011, p. 88). Nafisi's book cover, as Bahramitash put it, is a perfect example of an orientalist illustration of Muslim women "as victims of the cruel patriarchal practice" especially with their *hejabs* on (2005, p. 224). At the same time, the two Muslim girls seem to respond to Nafisi's idea of insubordination i.e. showing a few strands of hair. Nafisi's position becomes clearer when one focuses on the actual trigger for her denouncement, i.e. the denial of women's rights and the imposition of the *hejab*.

In a similar way to Dabashi, Marandi also believes that Nafisi's bias is illustrated through her disrespectful remarks on one of the biggest and most reputable universities of Iran, Al-Zahra University, which is open to women only. According to Nafisi, the entire teaching staff of the university are "utterly ignorant" and the girls there are disturbed young women

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<sup>151</sup> According to Dabashi (2006): "In its distorted form and framing, the picture is cropped so we no longer see the newspaper that the two young female students are holding in their hands, thus creating the illusion that they are 'Reading Lolita' – with the scarves of the two teenagers doing the task of 'in Tehran.'" In the original picture the two young students are obviously on a college campus, reading a newspaper that is reporting the latest results of a major parliamentary election in their country. Cropping the newspaper, their classmates behind them, and a perfectly visible photograph of President Khatami – the iconic representation of the reformist movement – out of the picture and suggesting that the two young women are reading "Lolita" strips them of their moral intelligence and their participation in the democratic aspirations of their homeland, ushering them into a colonial harem" (Dabashi, 2006, p. 7).



“who never had anyone to praise them for anything” (Marandi, 2009, p. 32). Nafisi’s position as a member of elite is essential in nurturing her sense of superiority. According to Marandi, Nafisi was proud of her immediate family, i.e. her parents- her father was the Mayor of Tehran and her mother was a Member of Parliament- due to their “affiliations towards the Western culture” (2009, p. 30). This is considerable in dismissing the voices of Al-Zahra university students because they “never knew any family members who had been raised abroad and/or were bilingual in English and Persian” (Bahramitash, 2005, p. 231). Nafisi admits that she does not have any patience towards these girls and in her opinion, they are all living in darkness. She also promised herself not to go back to that “college”, she does not even call it a university (Bahramitash, 2005, p. 231). “These qualifications”, as Nash argues, “align Nafisi with the bourgeois nationalist phase of Iran’s political and cultural development, in addition to registering disdain for anti-hegemonic positions such as that of Said (which she contends play into the hands of Islamists), alongside an overtly pro-Western feminism” (Nash, 2012, p. 58).

Apart from Dabashi and Marandi, Keshavarz argued that Nafisi operates in a way which sketches those who distance themselves from her as “fanatical, senseless, hypocritical and cowardly persons” (Keshavarz, 2007, p. 19). As Keshavarz shows Iranian male characters in the eyes of Nafisi are as follows:

Cinemas had been burnt, professors expelled students who disagreed with them, uncles who considered themselves ‘pure and chaste’ Muslims molested their nieces, and every twelve-year-old girl was ‘considered long ripe for marriage.’ A blind censor decided the fate of Iranian cinema, the Revolutionary guard who came to arrest a member of the armed position hid behind a woman servant in the author’s house for fear of being shot. Stern husbands and obnoxious brothers looked particularly deprived of humanity (Keshavarz, 2007, p. 19).

Nafisi’s position and authority is not welcomed in the Islamic Republic. The problems of Iran and its religious background, it is argued by the anti-orientalist scholars, are presented as failures because they do not allow the primacy of the individual. In holding individualist stances, Nafisi sees in public policies the cause of her disillusion with the Islamic Revolution and concludes that: “the Islamic Republic was a betrayal of Islam rather than its assertion” (Nafisi, 2004, p. 31). The implementation of rules derived from the Qur’an and *hadith* is pointed to as non-democratic, i.e. not favouring individual freedom. The first layer of Nafisi’s dissatisfaction with the rules restricting her individuality goes back to the Iranian government; and in the second layer her real problem is with application of Islamic rules by extremists in Iran. According to Keshavarz,

The book [*Reading Lolita in Tehran*] can be many things to many people. To some, it is a memoir, the personal encounters between a teacher and her students

in a classroom that is her own living room. To others, it is an episodic encounter with the evils of extremist Islam (Keshavarz, 2007, p. 18).

Nafisi's conclusion is bitter: "We are living in the Islamic republic of Iran grasped both by the tragedy and absurdity of the cruelty to which we were subjected" (Nafisi, 2003, p. 23). She has clearly perceived the new system as a violent imposition and an oppressive, unwanted reality. According to Bahramitash, Nafisi's representation expresses the Iranophobia and panders to liberal and orientalist feminism at the time of American's foreign policies against Iran (As cited in Nash, 2012, p. 59).

### ***Iran Awakening: A Memoir of Revolution and Hope, 2006***

The analysis of the autobiography of acclaimed Iranian lawyer and human rights activist Shirin Ebadi concludes this comparative overview of contemporary memoirs on Iran. In the case of *Iran Awakening*, there is more than one controversy. Just like in the cases examined above, the author, Shirin Ebadi, operates from a position of great authority. A former judge and the founder of the Defenders of Human Rights Centre in Iran, she was projected onto the international scene when she was awarded in 2003 the Nobel Peace Prize for her commitment to the cause of women and children in her native country. It should be added that she is to date the first Iranian woman to receive the prize. Ebadi's position gained increasing credibility with her frequent public appearances, including the advertisement of her opinions on issues such as Iranian domestic and international policies, including the controversial – yet secret – uranium enrichment programme (Gladstone, 2012). *Iran Awakening* was published in response to the *hejab* policies in Iran which, in turn, becomes symbolic of the lack of individual freedom. According to Ebadi, "the head-scarf 'invitation' was the first warning that this revolution might eat its sisters, which was what women called one another while agitating for the Shah's overthrow" (Ebadi, 2007, p. 39). Moving from family stories and personal, dramatic experiences, Ebadi envisages only one conclusion, i.e. to represent Iran and Iranians as patriarchal and extremist agents. She uses her dramatic experiences to present as wrong both the revolution and Islamic laws. "In *Iran Awakening*, she writes about Iran from within Iran and speaks eloquently about her deep disillusionment with the 1979 Islamic Revolution and of the direction that Iran has taken under the guidance of the *mullahs*" (Swapna, 2013, p. 1).

It was becoming apparent to educated Iranians that the revolution was veering in a vicious direction. Not only were the sympathies that had brought us out into the streets absent in many of the revolutionary processes under way, but there was an appetite for violence that seemed only to grow. (Ebadi, 2007, p. 51)

She believes that the Islamic government of Iran is a "just system in name only" (Ebadi, 2007, p. 110). In fact, the whole system is tainted by corruption and aggressiveness toward women and their bodies, particularly where *bi hejabi* – not wearing the scarf properly – is an

issue, as in her case.<sup>152</sup> Once again, just like Nafisi, Ebadi's problem is the Iranian government and the implementation of Islamic rules at public level. She declares that she has realized that Islamic rules are discriminatory and against women in Iran, and recites a "litany of objectionable laws"<sup>153</sup> (Ebadi, 2007, p. 111). The political system envisaged by Ebadi is one in contrast with that of the Islamic Republic. The 'democracy' discussed in *Iran Awakening* is essentially built on a balance of rights and duties aimed at the fulfilment of individual contingent and contextual needs. In Ebadi's language, "democracy works when people claim it as their own" rather than being compatible with *shari'ah* (Ebadi as cited in Swapna, 2013, p. 1). The subject of the book is the public and private life of a young lady whose individual voice and desires have been dramatically halted by the enforcement of religious policies. The *hejab* – as this (yet another) book cover shows – is once again at the centre of an impossible conversation between individual positions, and a social structure whose very nature and core principles is the lack of any individual push.

The works examined so far have been chosen because of their visibility and appreciated commercial market in the "West". They are all best-selling memoirs telling the story of courageous women in Iran and the consequences of its public policies. Autobiographical narratives are quite popular among immigrants, especially Muslim women. As a matter of fact, the Muslim autobiographical writing became especially popular post 9/11 due to "the politics of marketing and publishing Muslim autobiographies" in the "West" (Chambers, 2013, p. 6). Although every person and culture is different and the accounts of the fellow citizens "tend to conform to certain recognizable templates", but, "we are witnessing a fascination with Islamic life stories and with the longer United States history with Iran" (Miller, 2007, p. 541-542). This scenario, as I have illustrated in the above discussion, is the privileged arena for popular autobiographic narratives set against the background of revolutionary Iran. According to Miller, the stories of women under the veil and oppression of Islamists "seem to fascinate huge numbers of Western readers" (2007, p. 542). This fascination could be related to what Chambers (2013) mentions as the characteristic of most of Muslim writings especially post 9/11 as "part fiction, part ideology, and rarely descriptive or evaluative" (p. 8). Generally, this literary genre became increasingly popular in the 1980s, in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution. Writing an autobiography in Iranian culture is "taboo". According to Goldin,

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<sup>152</sup> Ebadi describes her experience of stripping of her judgeship. "The meeting in which I was stripped of my judgeship took place in a large room in the district court, in the final days of 1980. It was more a dismissal, really, than a meeting, because the men on the purging committee didn't even offer me a seat. They sat behind a wooden table. Two of them were judges I knew well, one of whom until the previous year had been my junior. I stubbornly kept standing, my hands grasping a seat back; I was six months pregnant, and I wondered whether they would at least be decent enough to suggest I sit down. One of them picked up a sheet of paper and rudely tossed it toward me across the table". (Ebadi, 2007, p. 48)

<sup>153</sup> "She defends individuals and groups who had fallen victims to a powerful politico- legal system that has been legitimized through an inhumane interpretation of Islam" (Swapna, 2013, p. 1).

“writing of self is frightening” (2004). The “modesty and secrecy inherent within Iranian culture has deterred the composition of female self-writing within the country until recently” (Goldin, 2004). In fact, the production of autobiographical narratives has been moved “beyond Iran’s borders, free from the punitive fundamentalism of the Iranian regime, to enjoy the freedom of expression provided in the West” (McIntosh, 2013, p. 2). “In many of the ‘misery memoirs’, Islam is presented as an undifferentiated monolith” (Chambers, 2013, p. 15). Chambers believes that all these memoir writers talk about Islam in a way that it seems that they have a very clear and fixed concept of Islam in their mind. Their image of Islam is mostly anti-women. When criticising Islam, one should be aware of the stereotypes of the religion and “recognises that patriarchal structures are common to most, if not all, religious traditions” (Chambers, 2013, p. 15).

The victims in autobiographies are mostly women. Mahmood also believes that “since the events of 9/11, this vastly popular autobiographical genre has played a pivotal role in securing the judgment that Islam’s mistreatment of women is a symptom of a much larger pathology that haunts Islam - namely, its propensity to violence” (2012, pp. 78-79). She also observes that autobiographies, with their tendency to embody the critical experience of the victim, eventually portray a situation that is acknowledged as pan-Islamic. It might be contended that memoir writers are “condemning Islam as deficient in so far as the arrangement of gender relations is concerned” (Nash, 2012, p. 60). In other words, “the uncertainties of the men, who are mostly, after all, products of a Muslim culture, might suggest that that culture has left their humanity, at least partially, intact” (Nash, 2012, p. 60).

There are issues of violations of human rights especially in the case of women in Islamic world as surveyed above. Regardless of the criticism of orientalism raised against many of these memoirs, it can also be said that their authors may well have tried to argue that the patriarchal or misogynist interpretations of the Qur’an is oppressive to women. Emphasising that there is no homogeneous set of Qur’anic interpretation, Nawal El Saadawi believes that the Qur’an can be interpreted from different standpoints (as cited in Chambers, 2013, p. 15). Misogynist or feminist interpretations of the Qur’an are just two ends of a spectrum and there are many other considerable positions in between. However, what the critics try to object to is the absorption “into an anti-Islamic discourse fronted by Muslim [immigrants], privileged as experts and first hand reporters, who lay open Muslim’s mistreatment and abuse of human rights” (Nash, 2012, p. 68). These memoir authors, as Nash stated, “repeat platitudes about Western democracy and human rights without speculating too deeply on the negative aspects of life in the West (such as its racism or anti-immigrant behaviours)” (2012, p. 68).

They ignore how Western states’ foreign policies impact on Muslim nations, such as their double-standards of supporting or ignoring ugly regimes, they

suddenly turning volte-face and furiously discovering and condemning human rights abuses in them, especially ill-treatment of women. They dismiss criticism of such inconsistencies as joining the ranks of Muslim sympathisers and fellow travellers like Said. (Nash, 2012, p. 69)

Not all of these memoirs “are mere stooges of Western anti-Muslim propaganda; but taken together they clearly demonstrate a discourse nurtured and disseminated by an ideology much more powerful” than the individual stances I have been discussing in this study (Nash, 2012, p. 69). A still further explanation might lie in the fact that, Muslim’s accusation of violating human rights and democracy might be due to “not sharing the universal experiences in a language and context that everyone can relate to” (Janmohamed as cited in Chambers, 2013, p. 14). This will be examined in the third chapter of this study.

### **Contextualising the position of Satrapi**

According to Scharff, “In the cultural era of postfeminism, neoliberalism and individualisation, feminism is not an identity easily claimed” (Scharff, 2011, p. 2). Research has shown that “feminism is overwhelmingly unpopular, indeed almost hated” (McRobbie et al. as cited in Scharff, 2011, p. 2). As mentioned before and in line with her intention to write *Persepolis*, Satrapi’s rejection of being a feminist can be due to a number of reasons. Many scholars such as Nadia Sarria (2012) believe that Satrapi’s objection to gender policies in Iran demonstrates that a “feminist agenda” can be attributed to her. Sarria also alludes to ambiguities in Satrapi’s work and suggests that besides portraying Iranian society as stifled and oppressed by patriarchy, “it seems that her thoughts on Western feminism doesn’t [sic] give credit where credit is due, but rather, dismisses its importance” (Sarria, 2012). Satrapi, Sarria argues, seems to give importance to “female agency – something that is very feminist in nature” (Sarria, 2012). The evidence offered by Sarria is that while in Austria, Satrapi gets to know herself as a female by reading and studying “her mother’s favourite book, *The Second Sex* by Simone De Beauvoir” (Sarria, 2012). Sarria believes (and shares her opinion with her readers) that Satrapi was aware of feminist discourses when she was a teenager “in the West and her stance on some issues in Iran seems to reflect that” (Sarria, 2012). An example is Satrapi’s early “objection” to the veil (Satrapi, 2003, p. 3).

Firstly, as it becomes clear throughout the book, Satrapi “shows awareness of gender inequalities” in the Iranian system (Scharff, 2011, p. 2). Her self-presentation as an empowered woman is to confirm her position as an Iranian woman who is far from the stereotypical views of Iranian women as “downtrodden weeds” (Satrapi in Kutschera, 2002). In fact, Satrapi’s rejection of the gender policies in Iran, mainly the *hejab*, is due to her individual approach to religion. She believes in uniqueness, and the *hejab* equals sameness to her. According to Stuart:

the *hijab* did the opposite, it took all that was special about each female and conformed them to be less than the perfectly distinct individuals they were; the scarf made them nothing more than a face in a crowd. Marjane saw the veil as something that not only hid her body, but her originality. In efforts to avoid suppressing her uniqueness Satrapi does everything she can to avoid conforming to the new Iranian law (Stuart, 2011).

The first encounter with little Marji is a compelling one. A cheerless ten-year-old girl is forced to wear the veil at school, a topic that aims to capture the sympathetic feeling of readers. As Hwink comprehensively expresses, the first immediate picture of the first chapter of *Persepolis* confirms this. In this picture, Satrapi draws attention to the sameness of the girls in her classroom (Satrapi, 2003, p. 3). According to Hwink, “the girls’ expressions range from neutrality to discomfort, negativity, or distress” (Hwink, 2012). Furthermore, we only know that it is Satrapi at the sharp left of this picture because she explicitly states this; this illustrates the point that because of their *hejabs*, she has to draw herself separately in order to be distinguished from the others. This emphasises the sameness created by their manner of dress - most notably the veil. As a “Westernised” woman who values individuality, this is immediately off-putting; framed like this, the rejection of the veil comes naturally to one who holds individual expression as synonymous with freedom (Hwink, 2012). In Scharff’s words, Satrapi “uses individualist rhetoric to portray herself as autonomous individual who is not in need of feminism” (2011, p. 2). In the case of Satrapi, her feminism “has been replaced with aggressive individualism” (Scharff, 2011, p. 5). Referring to France, Satrapi believes that women should have control and choice “over their bodies and lives” (Humm, 2003, p. 231). Based on one of her interviews, Hattenstone states that “she is not critical of the veil *per se*, she is critical of its imposition” (2008). Satrapi said: “I really believe in a society where if someone wants to walk in the street completely naked they will be able to, and if someone wants to wear a veil they will also be able to.” (Satrapi in Hattenstone, 2008). These “individualist discourses of ‘empowerment’ and ‘choice’ are deployed as a kind of substitute for feminism, rendering feminism redundant” (McRobbie, 2009, p. 1). Satrapi’s individualist orientations are originated from her liberal “Westernised” background as bearer of rights *vis-à-vis* the communal identity and responsibility.

Secondly, Satrapi’s dis-identification with feminists and her individual identity “is intertwined with the othering of Muslim women” in this case other Iranians (Scharff, 2011, p. 2). Satrapi’s repudiation of feminism is very much engaged with her purpose of writing her autobiography. Satrapi’s *Persepolis* is a message of “humanity and love” according to her. It is a female story of coming of age. She has purposefully chosen the humanistic ideals to escape the boundary notions of “East” and “West”, male and female. “The image of feminists as predominantly white, middle-class, middle-aged, able-bodied and heterosexual” could be one of those reasons for disarticulating feminism by Satrapi (Scharff, 2011, p. 3). Being a woman

of colour, Satrapi is indeed supporting the equality of men and women, while “rejecting the institutional supports for feminism which may be more appealing or available to white women” (Scharff, 2011, p. 4). According to Afshar,

in the context of violence and Islamophobia in the post 9/11 and 7/7era Muslim women have found themselves at the centre of contestations about their identities, their nationalities and their faith and their commitment, or lack of it, to global feminist movements (2008, p. 411).

While being an Iranian who is proud of her nationality, it is hard for Satrapi to see her country named as the ‘axis of evil’ or to be framed as “terrorist” (Satrapi in Clarke, 2003). The view of Iranian women as “black crows” and Iranian men as “having beard with guns” embodies a sense of “otherisation” for Satrapi and categorises her as an oppressed Iranian woman (Kutschera, 2002). For example, Satrapi shows in the most iconic image a group of girls playing at school with their veils. In this picture, the girls reject the veil for different reasons i.e. either it is too hot to wear it or they are against it. According to Cawley, “resisting wearing the veil in a variety of creative ways runs counter to the images presented in the Western media of passive, victimized women who are oppressed and flattened into a monolithic group by wearing the veil” (n.d.). Satrapi’s rebellious position towards the veil is another subtle indicator to resist against the clichés and the image of an Iranian woman. When little Marjane was stopped by the guardians of the revolution for wearing a denim jacket and Nike sneakers, this is another attempt to challenge the oppressive image of an Iranian woman. As Cawley argues, “an embrace of Western appearance through clothing is shown to be an act of resistance for Iranians, particularly Iranians who, like Marjane at this point, have not been to the West and experienced alienation or isolation there” (Cawley, n.d.). It might appear that, this trope of resistance “through an embrace of Western culture appears to support Western liberal feminist ideology, the fact that these women demonstrate agency and independence” (Cawley, n.d.). However, “as the veil comes to represent the repressions that exist in Iran – not merely the act of veiling but gender injustices as well - it is by protesting the veil that Satrapi protests these repressions” (Mpottash, 2008). While Satrapi’s resistance to the veil is to escape the stereotypical image of oppressed veiled women and to show Iranian women are not passive and oppressed, many “Western” feminists translated her act of rebellion as her complete hostility towards the veil itself. Such interpretation of Satrapi’s resistance towards the *hejab* creates blocks in the way of unity among feminists. This can be the reason that so many scholars or activists “use a feminist analysis and define their work in a human rights framework” among them Satrapi (Seedat, 2013, p. 32).

In discussions on Islamic feminism, what is at stake is that the gender struggle in Islam can be perceived as very much similar to gender struggle by “Western” feminists. Therefore, most of the proposed solutions for an Islamic context are the same as those in a non-Islamic

one, because “the legitimate articulations of the category of ‘female’ have been discursively drawn and mapped in ways that privilege a particular construction of womanhood based on Western, liberal, secular notions” (Zine, 2004, p. 167). In this case, the rescue of Muslim women from shackles of oppression is normally through “Western” norms of womanhood. In such a context, Moghissi believes, “the role and status of Muslim woman would become a stick with which the West could beat the East” (Malti-Douglas as cited in Moghissi, 1999, p. 16). Satrapi’s rejection of feminism could be in line with this viewpoint that some “Western feminist articulations of Muslim women’s identities have appropriated colonial discourses that construct Muslim women as backward and oppressed” (Zine, 2004, p. 169). Hence, her rejection of being a feminist. Furthermore, as Seedat put it “the broad narrative of Islamic feminism is of newly educated Muslim women who offer innovative challenges to Islam. This is only a slight departure from the historical Western narrative that explicitly associates Islam with the oppression of women” (2013, p. 42). Again, this constructed notion of Islamic feminism is what Satrapi challenges all throughout her work, and one of the many reasons she does not want to be labelled a feminist.

To confirm Satrapi’s point regarding the gap between feminists, I would like to refer to Moghissi and Mojab’s discussions of feminism within Islam which clearly draw a line between Islam as an ideology and feminism as a “Western” product. Moghissi proposes that “being a feminist begins with the refusal to subordinate one’s life to the male-centred dictates of religious and non-religious institutions” (1999, p. 140). This notion can be translated into an equal valuation of men and women, not privileging one over the other. This definition is diametrically opposed to that of Islam in that women and men’s relationship is not that of social equality. She questions the possibility of a religion which is based on gender hierarchy “to be adopted as the framework for struggle for gender democracy and women’s equality with men” (Zine, 2004, p. 179). In Moghissi’s views, *shari’ah* “is not compatible with the principle of the equality of human beings” (Zine, 2004, p. 179). Therefore, by legitimising the equality discourses, “feminism finds it difficult to view equality work in terms not associated with its own European intellectual tradition” (Seedat, 2013, p. 35). Remaining dismissive to discussions of gender justice under the *shari’ah*, secular feminists like Moghissi reject “any form of epistemological reform” (Zine, 2004, p. 179). As the result, any attempt of interpreting the Qur’an with an antipatriarchal lens is futile. According to Mojab,

It is doubtful whether the discarding of Islamic texts other than the holy Koran would lead to dramatic change in the status of women. It is even more doubtful that the interpretation of the Koran by women would have a substantial impact on gender relations in the Islamic societies. Studies of the Koran show that males and females do not enjoy equal status. No amount of feminist interpretation of the text can explain or justify this unequal relation. (Mojab in Zine, 2004, p. 179).



Moghissi or Mojab's theorizing, as a sample of secular feminists, has actually closed the doors of any new and anti-patriarchal interpretation of the Qur'an. Zine believes that dismissing the alternative reading of Qur'an "actually reinforces a patriarchal and fundamentalist view", this equals to falling into the "same trap as fundamentalists, who derive only static and literal meanings from the Qur'an, and see the human interpretation of laws derived from religious texts as inviolable and fixed rather than as the product of historical, cultural and gendered attempts" (Zine, 2004, p. 180). Zine argues that "such narrow views collapse the broad arena of Muslim women's religious orientations into a singular, static mold and are counteractive to the polyvocality that anti-racist feminist discourses have sought to encourage" (2004, p. 180). Satrapi's intention to show disdain for feminist discourses seems to be in line with this notion of fast-frozen "atemporal Islam" (Nash, 2012, p. 52) which hinders the possibility of coalition with universal identity of women.

As the claim of the third wave has always been to respect the pluralities of race, ethnicity, colour, nationality, culture, class, autonomy and self-determination, "religious identities and experiences are conceived to be in contest with feminism"; or mostly "religious identities are presented as part of women's broader 'cultural' identity, which acknowledges the influence of religion, but does not examine theology, religious practice, text, dogma or the religious as a lived aspect of identity" (Llewellyn and Trzebiatowska, 2013, p. 250). Furthermore, religious feminists are seen by secular feminists as traditionalists. In other words, as much as the feminist scholarship has been subordinated in academia by males, religion has been marginalised in feminist circles (Llewellyn and Trzebiatowska, 2013, p. 245). It is argued that, if the mission of third wave feminism is to embrace different ideological frameworks in order to make women more empowered,

Then it is not sufficient for feminism to consider or impose a secular language of gender analysis onto the lives of women whose values are framed by religion. Instead, secular feminism must learn the language of religious women globally through engagement and dialogue to begin to account for women in relation to her many identities and experiences (Llewellyn and Trzebiatowska, 2013, p. 255).

Secular feminism, which is not flexible, "goes hand in hand with anti-Islamic and xenophobic attitudes" (Braidotti as cited in Llewellyn and Trzebiatowska, 2013, p. 252). This issue is of great importance in discussions of secular/religious disarticulation especially in the third wave, with its claims on the inclusive and pluralistic nature of feminism (Snyder-Hall, 2010, p. 255). This logic could be applied to the act of wearing the veil "where Muslim women who choose to veil [...] treated as victims of false consciousness, and those who speak out against veiling and abandon the practice themselves are applauded by secular feminists as enlightened and on the right side of the fence" (Llewellyn and Trzebiatowska, 2013, p. 253).

Satrapi's dual position towards the *hejab*, against its imposition and its banishment, clearly confirms Llewellyn and Trzebiatowska's point. By showing her opposition to the oppressed policies of the Iranian government, Satrapi does her best to delete the idea of "Eastern/Western" woman. Anne Kingston (2012), a "Western" feminist, believes "it is natural for a Western feminist such as myself to read oppression into the images of women covering themselves, either with a full body covering, a full face covering, or a veil that covers the hair" (as cited in Hwink, 2012). Although, rejecting the veil seems to confirm the essentialist notions, Satrapi tries to wipe them out through a different look at *hejab* (her rebellious position). It seems that the *hejab* is a kind of barrier that separates Iranian women from the rest of the world. Her message of love and humanity places her work beyond the discussions of Muslim, secular or "Western" feminism. Based on what I have discussed so far, Satrapi's position, in my opinion, is an inclusive one in which she sees no difference between women as human beings or feminism of any kind.

In summary, "when Muslim women articulate a gender consciousness and offer an analysis of sex equality, the imperial relationship they occupy under feminism prompts feminists to read their consciousness and analysis as a kind of feminism" (Seedat, 2013, p. 35). Satrapi or other Iranian autobiographers who talk about gender discrimination or patriarchy in post-revolutionary Iran deal with feminist topics and agendas. Whether she is one or not is not the point here. However, Satrapi's case is a more nuanced one. The main argument here is to show the different viewpoints on the *hejab* as illustrated in the work of Satrapi. It must be acknowledged that Satrapi's critical position towards the Islamic policies of the Iranian state is very unlikely to put her in the box of feminism.

### **The *hejab* in Iran**

In discussions of the *hejab*, the religion tends to be introduced as a sign of oppression and little attention has been paid to the ideology of the *hejab* or the political historical and social background of it. I will discuss in the following section that the *hejab* in Iranian society could be part of general discourses on gender and state. Iran's enforcement of norms in matter of public conduct – e.g. the *hejab* – is a complex issue that results from the history of Iran. As Mohanty argues, Iranian policies on the *hejab* are different throughout the history. At some point, "Iranian middle-class women veiled themselves during the 1979 revolution to indicate solidarity with their veiled, working-class sisters, while in contemporary Iran, mandatory Islamic laws dictate that all Iranian women wear veils" (2003, p. 34). The result of both occasions was the same. Iranian women were all veiled. In the former case, their veiling were due to their critical position towards the dictatorial policies of the Shah as well as showing their opposition to cultural and imperial domination of foreign powers. In the second case, they were forced to wear the veil in line with political Islamization of the country. The meaning

attached to each of these events differentiates the historical context with various political strategies. The fact is that, politicians have abused religion at times. From the oppression of Muslim women in Islamic countries to Islamophobia and discriminatory policies of “Western” governments, there are situations in which religion has been misapprehended and abused “in service of particular political goals” (Zine, 2004, p. 184). With reference to the political and social significance of the *hejab*, it becomes clear that there is no choice for a woman in terms of the *hejab* in Iran. Therefore, the *hejab* as the most significant sign of oppression became the symbol for women’s critical position towards the state policies.

Satrapi’s awareness of some gender issues is loaded with many political implications. In general, by discussing gender issues within Islamic society, the borders get blurred to distinguish between Islam as a ruling system and Islam as a faith or ideology. “Mernissi cautions intellectuals not to confuse Islam as belief and personal choice, and Islam as law, as state religion” (Moghissi, 1999, p. 138). This is sound advice. Similarly, Ziba Mir-Hosseini distinguished between religion as a set of “institutions, practices and laws” and faith as a set of “values and principles” stating that the failure in differentiating the two would result in “the pervasive polemic/rhetorical trick of either glorifying a faith without acknowledging the horrors and abuses that are committed in its name, or condemning it by equating it with those abuses” (2011, p. 2). The point is that, the role of the state should not be ignored or remained untouched in forming the critical agendas. The post-revolutionary literary and scholarly works have largely used feminist agendas as a critical tool, while their main objection is towards Islamism or Islam as a ruling system in their commentaries and records. According to Moghissi, Islam on its own “cannot be taken as the sole signifier of the situation of women in Islamic societies” (Moghissi, 1999, p. 18). The problem arises when cultural or political Islam which is regulated by the government becomes “the one size fits all robe that all women (and men) are forced to wear” (Moghissi, 1999, p. 135). When the *shari’ah* acts as a powerful ideology for politicians, it equals with patriarchy and authoritarianism rather than sacred source of justice. As mentioned in the introduction, the Islamization of the country acted as a catalyst in forming feminist movements. The mandatory dress code following the revolution as a marker of a nation let many feminists and women activists resort to orientalist clichés to attack the Islamist policies of the revolutionary government. As a result, claiming basic human rights or speaking against the state policies in Iran became a challenge for many secular/Muslim feminists, Iranian expatriates and non-Muslim minorities.

According to Moghissi, “unlike Muslim reformers, the ultimate goal of [post-revolutionary authors], however, was not to modify *Shari’a*, but to do away with it altogether” (1999, p. 130). They only wish to “*de-Shari’atize* their country’s legal and political structures” (1999, p. 131). They have actually chosen the “lesser evil” option to “overcome the resistance

of conservatives, including Islamic clerics and jurists, who manipulated public sentiments to block change and to present modern values and practices as un-Islamic and anti-Qur'an" (1999, p. 131). In a nutshell, in Moghissi's words, these women cannot be called Muslim feminists as their main concern is the foundationalism<sup>154</sup> of the Islamic Republic of Iran not the *shari'ah*. In authoring their autobiographies, "no need was felt to highlight or emphasise the Islamic character of the activities which were carried out for improving women's lot" (Moghissi, 1999, p. 131). Therefore, as Moghissi believes, these discourses should not be taken under the banner of Islamic feminism but "Islamic fundamentalism" (1999).

The positions of scholars on the concept of "Islamic fundamentalism" are different. One group totally rejects the possibilities of discussions between Islam as a ruling system and feminism. As Moghissi argues "for them, hostility towards feminism and feminist demands is inherent in divine laws, and women's liberation in Islamic societies must therefore start with de-Islamization of every aspect of life. Hence, feminism and Islam cannot be reconciled" (Moghissi, 1999, p. 134). In Mir-Hosseini's words, the Islamic feminism in Iran is the "unwanted child of Islamic fundamentalism" (2011, p. 6). The state's emphasis on the implementation of *shari'ah* in the context of the society to provoke women to question the base of *shari'ah* with reference to international human rights. "The Islamists' defence of patriarchal rulings as 'God's Law' and as promoting an authentic and 'Islamic' way of life, brought the classical jurisprudential texts out of the closet" (Mir-Hosseini, 2011, p. 6). According to Mir-Hosseini, it was only after the Islamic Revolution that critical voices and feminist scholarships emerged in Iran, aspiring for a more egalitarian interpretation of *shari'ah*. Satrapi's position in advocating the separation of religion and politics seems to be in line with this movement. Calls for reform, liberty and gender equality can be the immediate solutions to the problem of women's oppression under Islam in general. Consequently, a more liberal and enlightened version of Islam, one that is more compatible with modern approaches

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<sup>154</sup> According to Poston, "foundationalists maintain that some beliefs are properly basic and that the rest of one's beliefs inherit their epistemic status (knowledge or justification) in virtue of receiving proper support from the basic beliefs" (Poston, n.d.). It is argued that foundationalists assume a base for their argument. They believe that a finite set of reasons or a linear reasoning should be endorsed in the regress argument. For example, one can understand the political theory of Khomeini only if he knows some other claims such as the *velayat* in Shi'ism. The support the belief in *velayat* provides for his belief in *velayat-e faqih* illustrates that one's first belief is epistemically dependent on the belief in *velayat*. I consider Ayatollah Khomeini as a foundationalist, who takes as the foundation the allegedly indubitable knowledge of the sovereignty of God. This is a foundational belief for Khomeini, "which do not require any reason for it, and all the rest of his justified beliefs are based upon it" (Huemer, 2002, p. 370). Every other justified belief must be grounded ultimately in this knowledge. Khomeini supported his belief in *velayat-e faqih* by belief in the legislative power of God. The structural conditions for justification of *velayat-e faqih* are not equal among all Shi'i *olama*. What matters is the proper epistemic structure for Khomeini's belief. This has been argued by many critics as they do not see a proper structure for Khomeini's belief. My main aim in this research is to provide an account of the contours of the doctrine of *velayat-e faqih* and its in/compatibility with democracy or human rights in Iran and to provoke a discussion about how we should understand this claim.

or “Western” culture, is inevitably recommended. The need to revise Islamic theology and reinterpret Islamic values has become indispensable. This is reflected in feminist readings of the Qur’an, where two views emerge. Nash has also stated:

An official, text-centred Islam of the *ulema*, which coheres around the masculine world of the mosque, and a woman’s understanding of Islam, largely transmitted orally through female relatives, [...] the form of Islam privileged by literacy promoted a fixed and authoritarian interpretation identified with state power; throughout Islamic history this form was the enemy and oppressor of women (Nash, 2012, p. 53).

According to Moghissi, what these women criticise, is the “misogynist interpretations of the Qur’an and the male serving fabrication of the *hadith*, and attacked the veil, sex segregation and the gender-based restrictions that had been imposed on them” (Moghissi, 1999, p. 128). With a quick reference to Satrapi and other’s background – a privileged one i.e. elite intellectuals, “Western” educated, secularised- it can be argued that their objection to the degraded situation of women in Iran is the result of a culturally gender-biased interpretation of the Qur’an. Therefore, they try to look at the Qur’an and interpret the Islamic texts themselves. An example of this is Satrapi’s declaration:

We need to explain to young women that this interpretation of the Koran [sic] is a very masculine interpretation. It is time for women to read the holy book themselves, to interpret it themselves and to realise that the holy texts can be interpreted in so many different ways. Why has it been interpreted in this way? This is what these women need to ask (Cape, 2003).<sup>155</sup>

Based on her declarations above, Satrapi’s work can be interpreted in this or that direction, but I would associate her gender consciousness more to abuse of power by foundationalists in Iran.

Apart from discussions of “Islamic fundamentalism” and oppression of women under Islamists, as Mohanty argues, “to assume the mere practice of veiling [as] the universal oppression of women through sexual segregation not only is analytically reductive but also proves quite useless when it comes to the elaboration of oppositional political strategy” (2003, p. 34). Decontextualizing the study of contemporary Iranian society and the religious background could be a step towards orientalism that will lead to biased understanding of this culture and religion. According to Abu-Lughod (1998):

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<sup>155</sup> Similarly to Satrapi’s claims on feminine interpretation of the Qur’an, Ebadi has made clear in several instances that a more enlightened version of Islam and cultural reform of the Iranian social system is long overdue. Iranians, women particularly, should fight for a new interpretation of *shari’ah*. This should promote international human rights, democratic principles, equality before (human) laws, and freedom of speech. In particular, she has indicated the solution in “an interpretation of Islam that is in harmony with equality and democracy” which “is an authentic expression of faith” (BBC News, 2009).

Women in the Middle East must be studied not in terms of an undifferentiated “Islam” or Islamic culture but rather through differing political projects of nation-states, with their distinct histories, relationships to colonialism and the West, class politics, ideological uses of Islamic idioms (Abu-Lughod, 1998, p. 5).

It should be noted here that discussions on “non-Western” politics must be considered “within the context of a powerful tradition that, although it systematically oppresses women, also contains within itself a discourse that confers a high value on women’s place in the general scheme of things” (Narayan, 2004, p. 215). Further to that, “we should all attempt to cultivate the methodological habit of trying to understand the complexities of the oppression involved in different historical and cultural settings” (Narayan, 2004, p. 216). In a similar way, Scott (2007) believes that discussions of the veil cannot be studied without considering their political and historical background:

The study of political discourse is best undertaken through close readings of arguments advanced in their specific political and historical contexts. Without history we aren’t able to grasp the implications of the ideas being advanced; we don’t hear the resonances of words; we don’t see all of the symbols contained—for example—in a piece of cloth that serves as a veil (Scott, 2007, p. 8).

In fact, the various tensions that led to the Iranian Revolution had been in gestation for a while when the Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1919-1980), started meddling with peoples’ customs and beliefs (Mir-Hosseini as cited in El Guindi, 2000, p. 174). In 1935 by order of the Shah, all Iranian women were forced to take off their *hejab*. The day is known as *kashf-e hejab*, or the [day of the] removing of the veil.<sup>156</sup> This was followed by a public appearance of the Shah with his wife and daughters uncovered.<sup>157</sup> According to Sedghi: “Unveiling edict was implemented ruthlessly” (Sedghi, 2007, p. 87). After *kashf-e hejab*, policemen were under orders to snatch any women who were covering their head or body with the *hejab* in public.<sup>158</sup> This was felt as an unfair decree of a secular monarch aiming at

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<sup>156</sup> “Unveiling presented a new image of Iran. For the Shah and modern Iranians, the image of veiled women was synonymous with backwardness. This image had to be removed from the Iranian stage. Women who wanted to veil, and for whom the veil was part of their identity, were marginalised while modern, educated women emerged as a symbol of the new Iran. With their educations and modern looks, they were well suited for various governmental jobs. Veiled women, even if educated, were not allowed to work wearing the veil, not even the head scarf” (Zahedi as cited in Heath, 2008, p. 255).

<sup>157</sup> “An advance order had been issued to all women teachers and wives of ministers, high military officers, and government officials to appear in European clothes and hats, rather than chadors. [...] Reza Shah admitted to his family that the unveiling decision was ‘the hardest thing I’ve ever had to do.’ He then asked his daughters and wife to attend the ceremony unveiled and ‘serve as an example for other Persian women’” (Sedghi, 2007, p. 86).

<sup>158</sup> “An eyewitness interviewee from Tehran recalled that even a woman who wore a scarf in public was stopped by police who would joke with her and then without explanation, pull off the scarf or tear it into shreds. Another eyewitness commented that, without prior notice, officials would sometimes break into private homes or search door-to-door and arrest women wearing chadors in the privacy of their homes. A report from the city of Tabriz stated that only unveiled girls could receive diplomas or their degrees with honour” (Sedghi, 2007, p. 87).

attracting the sympathies of the “West”. According to Najmabadi, Reza Shah’s policies was not based on social movement but rather on a “military coup, and that he put the army at the centre of his political project, provided a weak base for legitimacy which was further eroded under the ‘sultanic’ rule of the last Pahlavi” (as cited in Kandiyoti, 1991, p. 5). It was also acknowledged as a policy against human rights and religious freedom. Iranians of almost all creeds and political colours, from clerics to communists, agreed on this (Salah, 2005).

The Pahlavis’ “Westernising” policies<sup>159</sup> and their capitalist cynicism left the people, and women in particular, demoralised. Although this invasion into the religious life of people, including folk beliefs and customs, did not last more than a few years, the Shah’s government contributed to creating a sense of displacement, and promoted an advancement that was possible only to the wealthiest and “Western” educated people. The rest of the population was subject to prejudice and discrimination. This was epitomised by the chasm between the regime and women, especially those who continued to use the *hejab*. “For the majority of Iranian women, removal of the veil meant committing a major sin and disgrace” (Sedghi, 2007, p. 87). These tensions continued to be exacerbated. Women were forced to accept the “Western” dress code, with their bodies and hair exalted as their most important contribution to society. As a result, dissatisfaction with the Shah’s policies brought women to the scene of politics for the first time. Events and ideas that contributed to the creation of compulsory veiling policies in Iran after the Islamic Revolution had actually formed as anti-Shah as they were originally anti-Islamic. As Sedghi (2007) reports:

Numerous women who had earlier exhibited secular tendencies in their social and personal relations, were now increasingly abandoning such Western attire [...] gradually they began to cover more and more of their bodies, hiding signs of sexuality in protest and solidarity but also as a new way of presenting themselves, their identities, and signalling their allegiances. The *chador* or scarves worn with loose shirts and trousers, or other forms of the *hijab* or modesty, forceably taken by Reza Shah Pahlavi were now becoming symbols of political resistance. Covering one’s body was now a sign of discontent, even a language of protest, power and politics (p. 195).

The imposition of the veil as a sign of virtue and decency became, thus, the only alternative to win the political and ideological battle against the Shah and his secular cultural policies. In the case of Iran, the veil-as a sign of religious identity- has been used “as a tool for any social, cultural or political machination, be it feminist or not” (Llewellyn and Trzebiatowska, 2013, p. 253). Not only before the revolution in Iran, but also after the Islamic Revolution, the *hejab* emerged as a new political discourse under Islamic culture and brought

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<sup>159</sup> “Members of the Iranian ruling class, specifically its shahs, were eager players in the technological modernization of their country; they were great admirers of Western gadgetry, quick to see its appeal and potential domestic use, especially as instruments of coercion and political control” (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1994, p. 44).

a new image of Iran to the scene. The rulings of the new government made veiling mandatory (Satrapi, 2003, p. 3). As it is clear, the veil is not only construed as a sign of oppression or a marker of distinction or social prestige. It has major political national meanings and implications. Throughout the history, “women have been crucial in establishing and maintaining the boundaries of nations and are often made into the symbolic markers of the nation itself” (Suad, 1996, p. 6). According to Fanon (1965), the veil is the best way to resist colonialism. Scott (2007) states that the veil gained its political meaning for the first time during the Algerian War (1954-1962).

In fact, the battle was more complicated than that [...] if the veil has one symbolic meaning for defenders of French rule, it had several conflicting meanings for the resisters. It was to be sure, a refusal of French appropriation of the country, a way of insisting on an independent identity for Algerians (Scott, 2007, p. 41).

Also, Iranian intellectual, Shariati (1996)<sup>160</sup> agrees with Fanon:

The Islamic modest dress is a symbol of opposing Western colonialism which has dominated us by force. This is a way to say “no” to fifty years of conspiracies, alienation and deceitful-looking Europeans in an Islamic community. This is a return to one’s own culture, identity, ideology and values (Shariati as cited in Bakhtiyar, 1996, p. 48).

Jennifer Heath also introduces the veil as a symbol of resistance and believes it is a political object, rather than an issue of tradition and oppression:

The custom of veiling has historically been a source of political manipulation, from the British treatment of it in Egypt in the 19th century to Ataturk’s and Reza Pahlavi’s forced unveilings in Turkey and Persia in the early twentieth century. It was a colonial and imperial football. It still is (Heath, 2008, p. 8).

Iranian social rules are defined and based on predominant interpretations of Islam. Enlivening and protection of social life with Islamic rules is considered as the responsibility of the government. Iranian policies on the *hejab* respond not only to religious and cultural notions, but also to national and historical traumas. In analysing the struggle over nationalism, cultural affiliations and gender issues in Iran, it is essential to explain the specificities of all, while de-essentialising the notions of religion, state, culture and gender. In fact, gender, religion, class, culture and ethnicity are relevant networks that can affect the state policies. Therefore, gender issues in Iran, particularly the *hejab*, are not self-referential categories. Religion can be a source of oppression but at the same time it can also “offer powerful spaces of resistance to injustice and provide avenues for critical contestation and political

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<sup>160</sup> “Shariati was an influential intellectual, with a doctorate in sociology from France. He was inspired by Jean-Paul Sartre’s existentialism, Frantz Fanon’s anti-colonial writings, and many left-leaning thinkers. His important and novel approach brought together Shiism and modernism” (Semati, 2008, p. 217).



engagement” (Zine, 2004, p. 185). For example, the veil is seen as an Islamic identity in many anti-colonial movements. It was used “as a symbol of political protest and revolutionary struggle in Algeria in the 1950s and in Iran<sup>161</sup> in the 1970s, and the *hijab* was donned by women who did not previously wear the Islamic head scarf” (Zine, 2004, p. 185). To neutralize or counter-balance the racist imagery of the *hejab*, Iran advocated anti-representational or self-affirmative concept of religion and the veil. The *hejab* has therefore been introduced as women’s empowerment, strength and resistance and in this way questioned the orientalist or imperialist discourses. Therefore, Iranian state policies on the *hejab*, which is shaped by these historical traumas and anti-imperialist responses, cannot be considered as merely a personal issue. It is argued that “privatisation of religion and morality has negative effects upon civil society and culture” (O’Mahony, Pererburs & Shomali, 2004, p. 18). A woman must comply with the *hejab* laws when living in Iran. It has already been observed that one cannot just observe the physical *hejab* in Iran without practising the “social prerequisites” (Tabataba’i,<sup>162</sup> 1982, vol. 16 [28:26]). According to Ayatollah Javadi Amuli (2003),<sup>163</sup> the *hejab* of women (in Iran specifically) is not only their personal duty, but it is the right of the community of believers that should be respected. The *hejab*, therefore, is respecting everyone’s rights, not just one’s own. Defining the *hejab* at a public level, categorises it under the social rules which are to be regulated by the government. Muslim duties are therefore defined in the social context by “subjecting to the control of a theocratic state” (Moghissi, 1999, p. 138). Mernissi believes that in such a context, being a non-Muslim would not keep one free from obeying the national laws set by the state (including crimes and the punishments). “Being Muslim is a civil matter, a national identity, a passport, a family code of laws, a code of public rights (Mernissi as cited in Moghissi, 1999, p. 138). However, growing up in a liberal and individual construct of “Western” citizenship, Satrapi believes that the *hejab* is an individual religious choice and therefore the government should not bring it into law. With reference to the history of Iran’s victimisation, when someone like Satrapi or other autobiographers express their opposition against *hejab* policies, their accounts would be interpreted as orientalist and imperialist representations of the Islamic Republic and Iranian culture. It seems that criticising one’s culture, religion or government makes Satrapi a contributor ‘to a pro-Western hegemonic discourse’. In Satrapi’s case, her objection is towards the imposition of the veil not the veil

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<sup>161</sup> Under the undemocratic and dictatorial regime of the Pahlavis, women from all backgrounds glorified Islamic ideology as the cure to all social imbalances. These women, who could not accept being unveiled and treated as individual sexualised units, demonstrated loudly their discontent with the Shah and embraced the values of the Islamic Revolution. For them, the veil was a means of resistance and the possibility to affirm their rights as members of the community.

<sup>162</sup> Allameh Tabataba’i (1904-1981) is the author of the prominent Shi’a scholarly book of Qur’anic exegesis called *Tafsir Al-Mizan*. This book has been translated into Farsi from Arabic in 40 volumes. He was a prominent Shi’a scholar in the fields of *tafsir*, philosophy and history of Shi’a.

<sup>163</sup> Abdollah Javadi Amuli (b. 1933) is a twelve Imami Shi’a *mojtahed* and a prominent politician. Ayatollah Amuli has studied in the Islamic seminary of Qom, Iran. He is the author of Tasnim *tafsir*.

itself. This means that Satrapi is critical towards the policies of the Islamic Republic (Islam as a ruling system), rather than the idea of veiling as an Islamic belief. Her intention and her work has thereof been perceived differently. Subsequently, *Persepolis*, as Mahmood argues, reinforces prejudicial impressions of Iran and reiterates the current ideology according to which Iran belongs to the axis of evil (2011, p. 87). Nasrin also states that, “if the Orientalists of the earlier periods were European and American travellers, the new Orientalists are native informers who, speaking from a position of authority and authenticity, dehumanise their own compatriots and wall them off from the rest of humanity” (2007). In this way, the neo orientalist, as Keshavarz contends in her *Jasmin and Stars*, fortify the barriers between cultures (2007).

In line with orientalist discourses, it seems as if books like *Persepolis* hardly create a commercial market for the media;<sup>164</sup> rather, the dictatorship of Iranian governmental Muslim agents and the oppression of women under the state would attract the receiver’s attention. Satrapi’s critical position has been analysed according to the politics of commercial marketing. The post-revolutionary autobiographical literature is mostly produced by a group of Iranians, who are in minority and are mostly “Western” educated and have a hand in academic writings i.e. Satrapi and other post-revolutionary memoirists. Iran has been mostly represented by this group especially those in exile following the revolution. As Poole and Richardson argue, they almost used a similar language<sup>165</sup> to criticise their indigenous culture. It goes without saying that:

Muslim sources are overwhelmingly only included and only quoted in reporting contexts critical of their actions and critical of their religion. When Muslim activities are not criticised - or when reported activities are not labelled as *Muslim* actions - Muslim sources are, almost without exception, absent from journalistic texts (Poole and Richardson, 2006, p. 115).

In discussions on orientalism, what should not be ignored is fighting the problems rooted in traditional cultures of Muslims and their struggle for self-definition and human rights of individuals. According to Warraq, Said’s *Orientalism* has emboldened the extremists and Islamists in many Muslim countries to “attack their opponents in the Middle East as slavish ‘Westernists’ who were out of touch with the authentic culture and values of their own countries” (Warraq, 2007, p. 49). The problems of Muslims and Arabs in general and violations of human rights by the governments in particular are due to this type of “comfort and absolution in being told that none of your problems are of your making, that you do not have to accept any responsibility for the ills besetting your society. It is all the fault of the

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<sup>164</sup> “The mass media are not in the least oriented towards a ‘world system,’ but in fact concentrate upon national markets, whose interests and stereotypes they largely reproduce” (Hafez as cited in El-Nawawy, 2010, p. 12).

<sup>165</sup> They are overly critical of the absolutism of the Islamic state.

West, of infidels” (Warraq, 2007, p. 246). Considering Iran’s relationship with the “West” and constructing the Iranian post-revolutionary identity as the “West’s” victim, Iranian officials “turn against their adversaries in uncompromising gestures of collective pride and righteous anti-imperialist revenge (Occidentalism)” (Huggan, 2005, p. 126). The orientalist critique of Iranian officials appears to reiterate the essentialising discourses they used to attack.

In Iran, the status of women and their *hejab* play a significant role in many strategies of the state. As markers of the nation, women and their appearances have been perceived as assertions of cultural authenticity and symbolic definition of the nation. However, “when women are used as icons of the nation, they often become captive to patriarchal structures and ideologies” (Suad, 1996, p. 6). As the *hejab* of women became nationally significant, the compulsory dress code was assumed to assert greater control over women, hence the subordination and oppression of women. The findings of researchers have broadly suggested that “veiling spread because Islamist male leaders conceived of veiling as strategically important to their movement” (Ahmed, 2011, p. 131). The relationship between veiling and Islamism is enormously complex. According to Ahmed, “*hijab* and Islamic attire were being quite deliberately, actively, and systematically promoted by Islamists” (2011, p. 151). Firstly, as mentioned earlier, with reference to the history of foreign power’s domination in Iran, the revolutionary government revitalized Iranian religious commitments with the veil through inspiring the concept of nationalism and independence. In the post-revolutionary era, the *chador* became specifically the symbol of anti-imperialism in Iran. Secondly, as the majority of Iranian women belonged to the working class and in response to the economic difficulty to cope with fashions and buying clothes, *chador* began to open its space among Iranian women. Finally, with regards to the increasing Islamic roles and movements of women during and after the revolution especially in politics, the *hejab* “was therefore important because it defined the Islamic movement and gave it an identity distinguishable from the rest of society” (Ahmed, 2011, p. 140).

In conclusion, as Moghissi argues, self-apologetic defence of Islamic practices by Islamist rulers, should not open the gates of “fundamentalism” as an ideology in opposition. According to her, a communal and national identity is needed in countering the anti-Muslim prejudices and neo-orientalist representations of Muslim societies, however, the danger lies in “in an apologetic or self-denying defence of Islamic gender practices or a justification of the oppressive discourses and actions of Islamist ideologues and rulers” (as cited in Nash, 2012, p. 54). Moghissi’s argument is significant in analysing the issues of gender and state in Iran, where “this intersection of religion, state and patriarchy reinforces communalist views of citizenship that tend to diminish women’s roles and rights as citizens” (Suad, 1996, p. 8).

### **Is the *hejab* a matter of 'choice'?**

Leila Ahmed believes that the veil should be seen as “a democratic practice which erases class origins, giving women a greater degree of social mobility while preserving their native culture and signalling a determination to move forward to modernity” (Ahmed as cited in Moghissi, 1999, p. 42). This point of view focuses on choice, a heated debate in feminism where the idea of wearing the veil should be considered within the framework of freedom of choice. The *hejab*, like any other women’s issues “requires not a particular set of choices, but rather acting with a ‘feminist consciousness,’ defined as ‘knowledge of what one is doing and why one is doing it’” (Snyder-Hall, 2010, p. 256). Bringing the *hejab* under a set of rules controlled by the government would not only refute the concept of choice and empowerment in women, but also can leave many women undecided about their position towards it. This will explain why, whenever Satrapi wants to question the veil and its ideology, she delivers the democratisation of the Iranian state as core to the process. In *Persepolis*, in other words, when Satrapi wants to construct her gendered identity, she inevitably points at the imbalances generated by the policies of the Iranian government. In fact, Satrapi’s argument is that, the *hejab* rules in Iran stem from the patriarchal interpretation of the Qur’an. Not directly questioning Islamic values, Satrapi attributes the compulsory *hejab* and patriarchy to the government. Satrapi’s position on the veil is a dual one. She believes that: “the young women who have been expelled from school for wearing a veil should have the freedom to choose. It is surely a basic human rights that someone can choose what she wears without interference from the state” (Satrapi in *The Guardian*, 2003). In another interview, she says: “all my life I have been against the veil, and now I am the one defending the veil. I hate the veil and what it means, I would never put that thing on my head, but I put myself in their place. It’s a question of these girls’ identity” (Satrapi in Tully, 2004).

Generally, “women’s relationship to their own socially constructed desires has been a challenge for feminism” (Snyder-Hall, 2010, 255). In fact, Muslim/secular feminism splits over issues related to the *hejab*. Satrapi, as a non-feminist, and other feminists find themselves on opposite sides of a contentious debate with one side seeing evidence of patriarchal and oppressive dimension of the veil and the other opportunities for resilience, resistance and empowerment. A self-defined “humanist”, Satrapi argues that she locates herself in between two perspectives, neither for nor against the *hejab*, without embracing either. As mentioned before, Satrapi’s neutral position towards the *hejab* seems to be in line with this *ayeh* (2:256) of the Qur’an. She believes that compulsion has no place in the *hejab* rules. Therefore, what is important, beyond the discussions of the *hejab*, is the matter of choice for women. Satrapi’s objection to either the Islamic Republic or feminists and media is of this nature. She simply

questions that if the *hejab* is supposed to be making one's choice, then why the Islamic Republic made it mandatory or "Western" feminists recognised it as a sign of oppression.

The *hejab* image in *Persepolis* highlights sharp contrasts between the stereotypical representations of the *hejab* and Satrapi's views on it. In other words, mostly, women who are veiled are perceived by many "Westerners" as being in the general category (i.e. oppressed) - while Satrapi is completely aware of the differences between veiled women. She classifies herself as a modern, individualistic and avant-garde woman who is rejecting the public rules of the society, and showing her individual opposition by her personal way of *hejab* and listening to music on her Walkman, etc. (Satrapi, 2003, p. 148) - whereas the "Western" audience might not notice this difference unless the author draws attention to it. What Satrapi tries to communicate is the idea that not every woman who is veiled, is oppressed. This can clearly be seen in Satrapi's rebellious position towards the veil. In *Persepolis*, we see in many occasions that Satrapi is rebelling against the social orders with the help of the veil. In the vignette she wears "Western" outfit, for example, she mentions that "of course" she wears the veil. "The fact that Satrapi writes 'of course' indicates the way in which the veil became a part of her life. However, even within the confines of the veil, Satrapi rebels against certain restrictions of Iranian society and expresses her individuality" (Mpottash, 2008). Upon her return from Austria, she tries to reform her position in small social units, i.e. family, friends, classmates, university. As an Iranian, Satrapi is very well aware of the consequences of an overt violation of the law on the *hejab*-wearing. Thus, she administers her ability to conspire against the veil with the veil.

This trend continues at school, where Satrapi is the leader of the class and the one plotting rebellion against the fully veiled school principal and teachers (Satrapi, 2003, pp. 97-144); According to Mpottash, "Satrapi rebels against general political restrictions of society, but not against the veil itself. She also rebels while still wearing the veil, illustrating the ever-present restrictions that the veil represents" (2008). The next example is at university in Tehran, where bearded male lecturers were informed of her views on decency, gender and sex (Satrapi, 2003, p. 303). In this case, one "must acknowledge that by wearing the veil, Satrapi remains within the confines of certain restrictions and shows that she is not completely rejecting Islam; thus, wearing the veil protects her and allows her to rebel, again making the veil a necessity" (Mpottash, 2008). This also shows the empowerment of women by wearing the veil. If Satrapi did not have the veil on, her claims would have been perceived differently within society<sup>166</sup>. In all these examples, the message is clear and that is the fact that Satrapi

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<sup>166</sup> This can be compared to Asma Mahfouz the woman who is believed to have started the revolution in Egypt. She came out on Facebook calling for protests on Tahrir square with the *hejab*. Her veil gave

does not want to be oppressed by the veil. She portrays herself in a way that is far from the stereotypical representation of veiled women. She does her best to escape this image by “designing her own way of *hijab*” (Sarria, 2012). By staying within the restrictions of the veil, Satrapi challenges its imposition. This personal form of rejection of the veil is meaningful for Satrapi alone, because it allows her to express her individuality. Especially when she designs her own way of veiling, she makes her individual choice. By censoring Satrapi’s position towards the *hejab* ban in France,<sup>167</sup> and representing the veil as only a sign of oppression, the feminist circles and the media reinforce the mono standard one lifestyle for feminist empowerment; while “feminism strives to be inclusive and respectful of the wide variety of choices women make as they attempt to balance equality and desire” (Snyder-Hall, 2010, p. 259). Kingston also believes that:

When “the road to female freedom [is] measured in media reports in terms of women’s access to lipstick and beauty salons,” [...] we may sense that there is something missing from our definition of female emancipation and our position on veiling (Kingston as cited in Hwink, 2012).

Discussions of the *hejab* in media have been more nuanced. On the one hand, the veil as the individualist ethos of the author signals her discrepancy with the sociality and solidarity the *hejab* promotes. Satrapi’s opposition to the *hejab*, by means of an advertising campaign, is built on the paradigm of courageous women resisting Islamic fanaticism, thus fostering stereotypical portrayals of Iran and Islam. In effect, the stereotypical representation of the veil<sup>168</sup> by the media has its roots in “Islamophobia, xenophobia and racism comparing it to the ‘minaret ban in Switzerland or the *burqa* ban in France’” (Lim as cited in Hwink, 2012). These representations of veil have actually facilitated the “Western” mission in their “rush to liberate Muslim women from the chains imposed on them by their faith. Such an analysis, by its very nature, made the *mohajabeh*, women who cover, into an object of pity if not fear” (Afshar,

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her religious and social capital to start the protest. “The notable fact is that, the self that Mahfouz creates is not a Western one. In each of her videos she appears veiled, an act that the West has consistently associated with a lack of agency and evidence of oppression of Muslim women” (Wall and El Zahed, 2011, p. 1339). Needless to say that Mahfouz’s action has been reflected in political media as a pushed activist with “ties to larger networks of other”, many of whom decided to articulate their discontent on the streets of Egypt through personal activist (p. 1341).

<sup>167</sup> “[D]uring the veil debates in France, they just wanted to use me as a witness saying, ‘Look at these Iranian women, they have suffered so much.’ And that was very funny, because all the Iranian people, they were against this law! From Shirin Ebadi to me, to all these people, all of us, we were against this law, because we know how it is when they force you to do something. So when they force you not to do it, they force you all the same” (Satrapi in Shaikh, Asia Society, n.d.). This is, as discussed, mirrored by Satrapi’s public position in matter of public policies both in Iran and in France. Just as she publicly disagrees with the rules of her native country, she objects to the *hejab* ban in her country of adoption.

<sup>168</sup> “Muslim women had already been defined as clear examples of the barbarism of Islam; Kilroy-Silk had already announced that: Muslims everywhere behave with equal savagery. They behead criminals, stone to death female \_ only female \_ adulteresses, throw acid in the faces of women who refuse to wear the chador, mutilate the genitals of young girls and ritually abuse animals . . . they are backward and evil, and if it is being racist to say so then I must be and happy and proud to be so. (*The Daily Express* 15 January 1995)” (Afshar, 2088, p. 420).

2008, p. 420). According to Afshar, this image of the veiled woman who has been forced to wear the veil has fostered the idea of liberating them “even if this had to be done at the expense of closing the doors of schools to them. Feminists of all shades were urged to step forward to ‘save’ the Muslim woman from her plight” (Afshar, 2008, p. 420). Reducing the veil into a sign of pity or fear or plight is the central reason in “shaping government policies banning the scarf from the schools in France” (Afshar, 2008, p. 420). In fact, Satrapi insists on criticising the ‘system’, whether it is the French or the Iranian government. Although Satrapi’s background is of the “Westernised” middle-class women and she does not like wearing a veil, but “one can also hope that being part of one oppressed group may enable an individual to have a more sympathetic understanding of issues relating to another kind of oppression” (Narayan, 2004, p. 220). As discussed before, the imposition of the *hejab* by Iranian government is a sign of suppression to Satrapi and a number of feminists. Having experienced such oppression by the government, Satrapi is against any kind of oppression. She states that:

The Western woman is so entranced by the idea that her emancipation comes from the miniskirt that she is convinced that if you have something on your head you are nothing. The women who are forced to wear the veil, and the women who are portrayed naked to sell everything from car tyres to orange juice, are both facing a form of oppression (Satrapi in *The Guardian*, 2003).

As it is clear about Satrapi’s personal position towards the *hejab*, she has never been against those who mindfully chose to wear it. Moghissi argues, “as a matter of individual choice, it is, of course, perfectly fine to blend [...] individual development and personal freedom with an equally strong sense of belonging to a community, wishing in this way to recover one’s culture and history” (Moghissi, 1999, p. 138). Satrapi has also been sympathetic towards those who wear the veil. Her ‘humanism’ is in fact one resulting from her concerns with human rights, but at the same time it signals her natural disposition to privilege individual stances, personal identity and choice. Based on her intention and purpose in authoring her work, (which is against the stereotypical representations of all Iranian women as oppressed and veiled), it is easier and more likely for Satrapi “to have critical insights into conditions of [different sorts of oppressions] than it is for those who live outside these structures” (Narayan, 2004, p. 220). Satrapi’s position on the veil is neither that of the “Western” feminists, nor that of the Islamic Republic but is closely linked to those who believe that human choice is the synonymous of freedom. Just like Satrapi, Afshar believes that the freedom of choice should be included in discussions of women’s rights. “Many forgot that if feminism is about anything it is about celebrating difference and respecting the choices that women make” (Afshar, 2008, p. 420).

The self-determination and freedom of choice over the veil have been debated among many feminists. Leila Ahmed argues that “the moment in which Islamic law and scriptural

interpretations were elaborated and cast into the forms considered authoritative to our own ways was a singularly unpropitious one for women” (1992, p. 100). Therefore, the feminist exegesis of the Qur’an is supposed to be a means of achieving freedom of choice and opposing the oppression.<sup>169</sup> It can be concluded that, ignoring the freedom of choice, as argued by the feminists, has increasingly marginalised the concept of the *hejab* according to the principles of Islamic piety and modesty and virtuous behaviour. It would be necessary to analyse the veil beyond a national signifier or a symbol of resistance. An appeal to understanding the coherence of the *hejab* with piety and modesty is neither to justify it, nor to argue its cultural relativism. It is, however, to take the necessary step toward explaining the religious consciousness and freedom of choice for women who wear it. The *hejab*, it is argued, can be a sign of virtue. According to Adil Hussein, the “veil is an expression of the principle of female modesty” and a symbol of morality and religious devoutness (as cited in Mahmood, 2011a, p. 52). As Minson argues, “morality is primarily a rational matter that entailed the exercise of the faculty of reason” (as cited in Mahmood, 2011a, p. 25). Morality can be realised through or manifest in “outward behavioural forms” i.e. the *hejab* (Kant as cited in Mahmood, 2011a, p. 25). According to Mahmood, many veiled women regard “outward bodily markers as an ineluctable means to the virtue of modesty” (2011a, p. 161). The act of veiling with no freedom of choice equals unreflective habit or custom and thus fails to apprehend its religious significance (Mahmood, 2011a, p. 54).

### **Conclusion**

It is clear that Satrapi’s individualist claims against the social values in Iran illustrated the clash of ideals between her views and those of the Islamic Republic. Beyond the *hejab*, the general contribution of *shari’ah* to people’s (especially women’s) public life in Iran has multiplied Satrapi’s critical exposition. Her secular background, her childhood fondness for revolutionaries such as Ernesto Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, Gandhi, Atatürk, Fatemi (2004, pp. 12, 16, 20), and her humanist ideals hold deeply divergent directions from those of Shi’a Islam and the norms promoted by the Islamic Republic of Iran. Satrapi’s position on the *hejab* is indicated throughout the book by means of personal narratives and the artistic rendering of the idea itself of veiling. She acknowledges that the socio-political reality in Iran is one featured by sharp contrasts. This is graphically and ideologically rendered by portraying the country during and after the revolution as a society marked by dichotomies. Her style seems to reinforce the orientalist paradigms in as much as it elaborates on the *hejab* as a sign of oppression, revealing Satrapi’s rebellious position towards it through embracing the

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<sup>169</sup> According to Zine, “this approach seeks to use the politics of hermeneutics as a means to create alternative readings of religious texts that build a discursive and spiritual basis for more equitable gender based structure, systems, and practices” (2004, p. 186).



“Western” culture and her own design of the *hejab*. However, Satrapi’s dual position towards the *hejab* and her belief over the concepts of choice and empowerment for women opens a new window in analysing her *intentio auctoris* quite opposite to what has been publicised and advertised by *intentio lectoris*.

A comparative study of other post-revolutionary memoirs with clearer feminist stances and purely critical position towards either the *hejab* or the Islamic Republic’s policies has shown that Satrapi’s case is different in terms of *intentio auctoris*. While Satrapi consciously and purposefully denies to be a feminist, contextualising her stance in feminist frameworks confirms her difference. As a woman who values individuality, Satrapi’s feminism is replaced with aggressive individualism and her belief in women’s agency. Her dis-identification with feminist circles is very much engaged with her Occidentalism as well as the predominant image of liberal secular feminism. Based on her *intentio auctoris*, Satrapi tries to make a balance between fast-frozen atemporal Islam which otherises the Occident and the secular liberal “Western” ideology which otherises the Orient. In conclusion, Satrapi with her *intentio auctoris* cannot be boxed as either a feminist or a non-feminist. Although, her critical position towards the *hejab* might be misleading to categorise her as a liberal secular feminist, however, based on her message and public declarations, it became apparent that she is not against the *hejab*, but against the imposition of it. This confirms her critique towards the Islamic Republic with the policy of compulsory *hejab*. Finally, contextualising the *hejab* in its historical pre and post-revolutionary background renders the justification of the current sensitivity over the *hejab* in Iran. Being a national political signifier, the *hejab* in Iran goes beyond the borders of discussions of religion and religiosity. Therefore, it cannot be identified as a personal issue and is defined at a public level to be regulated by the government. In such a context and as a national law, there is no choice for an individual. Any opposition towards law would be considered as an orientalist or imperialist threat, hence, the accusation of *Islam setizi*.

## CHAPTER THREE

### POST 2009 ELECTION EVENTS IN THE MIRROR OF *PERSEPOLIS*' EPIGONES

#### Introduction

Thirty years after the formation of the Islamic Republic, the outcome of Iran's presidential election is perceived as unfair and fraudulent. The post-election events in Iran in 2009 have been the source of inspiration for other diaspora Iranians to produce *Persepolis 2.0* and *Zahra's Paradise* after Satrapi's book. These two graphic novels tell the story of the Green Movement in a way that is reminiscent of Satrapi's *Persepolis*. Just like Satrapi's work, *Persepolis 2.0* and *Zahra's Paradise* target primarily non-Iranians, i.e. "Western" readers to let them familiarise with the Iranian post-election situation. This is done by means of semi-fictional narratives presented as autobiographic graphic novels. Being almost as successful as *Persepolis*, the epigones have been exposed (*intentio lectoris*) to the same tone of critique suffered by their predecessor and as a source of inspiration. They have been essentialized through their contribution to the rendition of violation of human rights and their representations of restrictive public policies in Iran.

The discussion of a "fiction based on the real-life story" is evocative of *Persepolis* and its epigones, which have been discussed as semi-fictionalised autobiographies (Schroeder, 2010, p. 6) that "challenge notions of objectivity, truth, and authenticity" (Hathaway, 2011, p. 251). The author of *Zahra's Paradise* stated in his interview with *Jadaliyya* that "nothing in *Zahra's Paradise* was invented; it is a sort of collage made up of real-life events strung together to make sense of what can sometimes seem too absurd to be true" (*Jadaliyya*, 2011). In a similar way, the authors of *Zahra's Paradise* –like Satrapi – have made their autobiography an eyewitness account of experiences they directly or indirectly went through. Accordingly, Hathaway believes that "a number of the most acclaimed and commercially successful 'graphic novels' of recent years have not been novels at all, but non-fiction memoirs in comic form, such as Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*" and its epigones in consequence (2011, p. 250). However, with regards to Satrapi and Amir's representations of the situation of prisoners<sup>170</sup> in Iran while they have never been one of them, it can be argued that their account is not truthful. In discussions of the aftermath of the 2009 elections, the crucial point seems to be why certain voices are given preference in "Western" academic and public discourse over

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<sup>170</sup> Reflecting on the situation of prisoners in Iran, Amir Soltani, one of *Zahra's Paradise's* creators, says: "I had witnessed, first-hand, the stories of what was happening to people in Evin Prison. Those abominable crimes had gone unpunished. And so murder, rape, and many other grave violations taking place inside Evin were being equated with the fundamentals of my religion, culture, and tradition. And not just in 1979. Things were so bad, and remained so bad for so long, that Human Rights Watch called one of its reports about Iran 'Like the Dead in their Coffins'" (Amir in *Jadaliyya*, 2011).

others (of which the two discussed works are an example), and how the depiction of prison torture in these works and their further reception either deliberately or inadvertently alludes to reinforcing the orientalist stereotypes.

This chapter is intended to show and analyse some aspects of *Persepolis* and its epigones “which differs significantly from traditional modes of biography and oral history” (Hathaway, 2011, p. 250). I will reflect on the way narratives are included in autobiographical memoirs, and how these are elaborated to offer a political account of the history and culture of Iran. My argument focuses on discussions of autobiography as a genre, in particular narratives of trauma to show that not full understanding of the autobiography as a dynamic concept is made to critique the reception of it as representing the history or culture of a nation. Following the discussions on the *intentio auctoris* and the *intentio lectoris*, one could, for example, discuss how these graphic novels are both de-contextualised and de-aestheticized in their reception to render orientalist characteristics.

### **An introduction to *Persepolis 2.0* and *Zahra’s Paradise***

Since the release of *Persepolis* in 2003 and its banishment in Iran in 2007, two Iranian university students, Payman and Sina,<sup>171</sup> used Satrapi’s style to have their voices heard all around the world. *Persepolis in Election* or *Persepolis 2.0*, a short ten-page long graphic story, is set against the backdrop of the June 2009 presidential election in Iran. The authors objected to the 2009 re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad raising doubts on its credibility. By reworking Satrapi’s graphic novel, Payman and Sina tried to depict the post-2009 election uprising and mass protests, claiming that the defeated opposition led by Mir Hossein Mousavi<sup>172</sup> actually won the election. Payman and Sina’s *Persepolis 2.0* describes their work as a critical letter to Mahmood Ahmadinejad and his victory on 13 June 2009. The criticism of the Iranian electoral commission was, they believe, their way of honouring a 26-year-old woman, Neda Agha Soltan, ‘who gave her blood in the way of liberty’.

By borrowing Satrapi’s illustrations, Payman and Sina maintained the original storyboard, however, the text was edited to reflect the post-election events. Khalili confirmed

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<sup>171</sup> Payman & Sina are two pen names of the authors of *Persepolis 2.0*, just like Amir and Khalil, the author and illustrator of *Zahra’s Paradise*. For safety reasons, they chose not to divulge their real names: “Are we scared for our personal safety and that of our loved ones? Is that why we’re hiding our true identities? Honestly, yes, and nobody should be surprised. The Iranian government has consistently shown its ruthlessness against those who dare to denounce it. The important thing is that, thanks to our anonymity, we have been entirely free to speak the truth without self-censoring in the least” (Amir in *Jadaliyya*, 2011).

<sup>172</sup> Mir Hossein Mousavi Khamene (b. 1942) was the main reformist challenger against Ahmadinejad “who served as Iran’s prime minister from 1981 to 1989, and ‘was given high ratings from running the country through almost all of the eight years of war with neighbouring Iraq’ (Muir, 2009)” (El-Nawawy, 2010, p. 4).

that just like *Persepolis* reflected the events of the Islamic Revolution 30 years before, so *Persepolis 2.0* is a mirror of the 2009 election.<sup>173</sup> Satrapi, who had no role whatsoever in creating this story, “gave her consent through her publishers without hesitation” (Khalili, 2009). As before, Payman and Sina’s outspoken rationale is to inform people throughout the world and provide support for freedom fighters in Iran, since “when Iran was in the media spotlight it gave people there so much motivation to keep fighting. External support really makes a difference” (Khalili, 2009).

Four years later, in March 2013, Iran was on the verge of another presidential election. Just like Payman and Sina, Amir and Khalil borrowed Satrapi’s distinctive technique and style<sup>174</sup> to reveal the story of a lost son in *Zahra’s Paradise*. The narrator, the blogger Hasan writing from Istanbul, lost his brother during the 2009 election protests in the streets of Tehran. Mehdi, Hasan’s lost brother, was later found dead. *Zahra’s Paradise* takes the audience into a labyrinth which leads to hospitals, jails, medico-legal institutions and morgues in Iran in a search for Mehdi. The search is conducted by Zahra, Hasan and Mehdi’s mother, and Maryam, a close friend. Later on, after the publication of the story, Zahra became a virtual candidate for president in Iran in 2013. She became a symbol of the pain suffered by all bereaved mothers who lost their children in the aftermath of the protests. She represented democratic and fair elections and made her voice heard against the injustice she suffered.

The creators of Zahra ran an online campaign for her virtual candidacy and introduced her to the world. In the Vote4Zahra website,<sup>175</sup> Zahra was nominated the representative of all women and mothers whose rights have been trampled by the Iranian government. They brought Zahra to the election scene to attract the world’s attention to the ‘anti-human rights’ situation of Iran. The character of Zahra used by Amir and Khalil to expose the election events, e.g. riots, demonstrations, political prisoners, human rights issues, and to open a new

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<sup>173</sup> Payman, in *The Guardian*, declared that: “*Persepolis* is the most iconic work for my post-revolution generation”. He continued: “We wanted to find something that people who did not care about Iran would be interested in. So far we have had 50,000 views in 150 countries and we’re putting out translations in Spanish, French, Portuguese and Italian”. He further stated that Arabic and Farsi versions will be coming next (Khalili, 2009).

<sup>174</sup> Whilst *Persepolis 2.0* used the same material of the original *Persepolis*, the creators of *Zahra’s Paradise* produced their own storyboard and text. There are indeed some similarities with *Persepolis*, such as for instance its graphic narrative technique, the intention of the authors, the intended readership, and its political concerns and aspirations.

<sup>175</sup> The “Vote4Zahra” online campaign has been encouraging the masses to ‘symbolically’ pick the comic-strip character as president” (El-Shenawi, 2013). “The Zahra for President Campaign is a collaboration between *United for Iran* and *Zahra’s Paradise*, two human rights initiatives launched in the aftermath of the 2009 presidential elections. The purpose of this virtual campaign is to create a collaborative space for the voice, vote and vision of the Iranian people” (Vote4Zahra.org, 2014).

discussion board on issues such as gender discrimination, oppression and human rights violations in Iran.

Demonstrators were mostly from two or three generations after the 1979 revolutionaries. They looked at Mir Hossein Mousavi with hope and enthusiasm, and most got involved with the campaigns.<sup>176</sup> This wave of commitment was favoured by the new style of debates between the candidates that was broadcasted from Iranian TV channels.<sup>177</sup> It was the first time in the Iranian public media that politicians clearly and with no hesitation insulted their opposition and even the previous politicians:<sup>178</sup>

This general feeling deepened after a televised debate between the candidates served to intensify the electoral rivalry. The debater's bold and public criticism of one another seemed to have lifted the dam of political censorship which usually prevented the people from saying what was truly on their mind. Society's public atmosphere also became freer for the greater criticism and the expression of people's true feelings. As a result, during the final month before the elections, every one living in Iran, particularly in the bigger cities, witnessed a public enthusiasm, energy and excitement. The people were constantly speaking of the change of circumstances (Michaelsen, 2011, p. 79).

Public debates actually brought voters to the polls.<sup>179</sup> The voting time was extended several times and some of the polling stations ran out of ballot cards before the closing hour. Besides this enthusiasm, early news reported the probable victory of Mousavi, thus arising his followers' expectations. In fact, by the end of the next day, Ahmadinejad won with 63 per cent of the votes in the first round. Finally, on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2009, a mass demonstration was initiated in Tehran against the officially announced victory ("alleged re-election", as CNN referred to it) of Ahmadinejad (Rollinson as cited in El-Nawawy, 2010, p. 9). The protesters rallied against the final results of the election with such slogans as "Where is my vote?", "Give my vote back" or "My martyr brother, I will take your vote back".<sup>180</sup> Such spontaneous reaction

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<sup>176</sup> "Newspapers, some with identified linkages to organized political parties, have editorialised in favour of their preferred candidates and in two key presidential elections -1997 and 2009 -television debates among candidates played a significant role in introducing challengers to the public and increasing voter turnout" (Farhi, 2012, p. 5).

<sup>177</sup> "According to the Research Centre of Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, the tenth presidential debates were declared to be the most-watched programmes in Iran's history of broadcasting. Drawing some 200 million viewers, the debate between Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Mir Hossein Mousavi (June 3) gained the largest audience, 50 million of who were inside Iran while the other 150 million lived outside its borders" (Hosseini, 2010, pp. 88-89).

<sup>178</sup> "Ahmadinejad's public charges of corruption against key figures of the Islamic Republic whom he identified as the real forces behind Mousavi's candidacy also further buttressed the belief that the competition was real and consequential" (Farhi, 2012, p. 11).

<sup>179</sup> "Many undecided Iranians who had left their final voting decision to the outcome of the debates categorically acclaimed the president's courage to quake the foundations of feudalism and unveil the corruption. It is believed that the president's uncompromising stance in this interview won him a large number of votes throughout the country" (Ziabari, 2010, p. 84).

<sup>180</sup> Some of the slogans chanted by people in anti-government demonstrations in 2009 in Iran.

eventually erupted in the name of the “Green Movement”.<sup>181</sup> A number of Iranian officials, including the clergy, called the movement “*fetneh 88*”, the calamity of 2009, which- it was argued- was instigated mostly by the USA, Israel, UK and France. A number of alleged French and English spies were arrested as a result, and Mousavi, Karroubi (another one of the four candidates), some dissident figures and a number of journalists and supporters were labelled as instruments in the hands of foreigners. Some were under house arrest and some were jailed. Apart from this group, “[t]here were those among the opposition in and out of Iran - particularly those based in the US and aligned with Washington’s interest in ‘regime change’ in Iran - who thought it was geared to dismantle the ruling regime” (Dabashi, 2013). The protesters claimed that the election result was falsified. The situation was exacerbated by the supportive statement and congratulatory message of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, after Ahmadinejad’s re-election.<sup>182</sup> Upon the suppression of the movement by the Iranian government, dissident figures and human rights activists mostly opted to stay away from the unrest, and began writing publicly detailing human right abuses and civil right demands along with denouncing the illegitimacy of the Islamic Republic. Some took a step further and called the *vali-ye faqih*, Imam Khamenei, the big dictator. “The demonstrators rewarded him with the chant ‘*marg bar dictator*’ (death to the dictator). His position was weakened” (Axworthy, 2013, p. 407).

The defeated remnants of the Shah’s regime and the unfulfilled members of MKO<sup>183</sup> also moved in to support the demonstrators, while they were trying to retrieve their former position in ruling Iran again even though they had nothing to share with revolutionary Iranian ideology.<sup>184</sup> Apart from them, some members of the clergy, and ordinary Iranians from both

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<sup>181</sup> The colour green is recognized by Shi’as as the colour of the family descendants of the Prophet.

<sup>182</sup> This event was enough for the biased media to elaborate on the manipulation of the vote results. For example, the *Globe and Mail* included several statements elaborating on the corruption of the state. Sebastian Abbot wrote “Ayatollah Khamenei is a hard-liner who has battled reformists in the past, and whose support helped Mr Ahmadinejad first get elected in 2005. But analysts say he is also a political realist, and in the past he has made concessions to ensure his main goals—his own survival and that of Iran’s cleric-run system (2009, June 16)” (Abbot as cited in Eid and Dakrouy, 2010, p. 19).

<sup>183</sup> MKO is the short form of Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization, an “Islamic urban guerrilla group” (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1994, p. 198), which “was the first Iranian organisation to develop systematically a modern revolutionary interpretation of Islam - an interpretation that differed sharply from both the old conservative Islam of the traditional clergy and the new populist version formulated in the 1970s by Ayatollah Khomeini and his disciples. Its ideas are in some way comparable to those of Catholic ‘liberation theology’” (Abrahamian, 1989, p. 1).

<sup>184</sup> A part of this group were, as Dabashi narrates, “The main body of expatriate Iranians remained committed to the democratic aspirations of their homeland but equally adamant and vocal in opposition to the crippling economic sanctions that Washington neocons, their Zionist contingency, in collaboration with their Iranian allies, were seeking to impose on Iranians - or even talk of military strike - as a kind of ‘humanitarian intervention’. [...] Some of these dissidents joined intellectual US neocons operations and/or the pro-Israeli think-tanks to call for regime change in Iran. But the overwhelming majority of them opted for a full recognition of the dignified limits of what they could say or do from abroad and never joined the bandwagon of ‘regime changers’, or the treasonous path of plotting against their own homeland” (Dabashi, 2013).

inside and outside Iran criticised the totalitarianism of the Islamic government after the election of 2009. Payman and Sina, and Amir, among others, tried “to show how history was repeating itself in Iran” (Weaver, 2009).

### **The story of Zahra**

One similarity between *Persepolis* and *Zahra’s Paradise* is that both Satrapi and Amir, as human rights activists, have tried to demonstrate the despotism and injustice of the Iranian government from the viewpoint of a woman. Satrapi’s message is not positioned from feminist stances, as she has noted on various occasions. It is a cry for humanity. Conversely, Amir, as a man, intentionally makes use of a mother to compound the impact of his story, a message conveyed by the son of a bereaved mother. Amir’s choice is significant.

Firuzeh Mahmoudi, Amir’s colleague and an activist also used this female character to discuss the gender policies of the Islamic Republic. Zahra is the only (virtual) female candidate among eight male candidates. Bringing Zahra to the front promotes women’s rights for presidency in Iran. Zahra is described as the only candidate who runs for human rights because there is no other female among the male candidates to stand for human rights violations or democracy in Iran (Newzw, 2013).

Zahra’s vision for the future is an open, inclusive, and verdant society. In a sea of crony candidates controlled by Iran’s supreme leader, Zahra is the only candidate running on a human rights and democracy platform, and the only candidate calling for full equality of all Iranian citizens before the law. It is the Iranian people’s right to determine their own destiny in fair and free elections, and Zahra demands it (Vote4Zahra.org, 2013).

Amir and Khalil’s Zahra is more than bereaved mother. She is standing up for not only the bereaved of the 2009 post-election protests, but for every single Iranian citizen. Though a virtual candidate, Khodayari (2013) sees in Zahra all the characteristics of a real candidate. The designers of the Vote4Zahra website and the organisers of “United for Iran” were hoping to make their voices heard worldwide through Zahra’s candidacy, and tried to increase the number of votes for Zahra through the book and the website. They intended to show the world what was happening in Iran, just like Satrapi.

According to Amir, the Zahra character is not entirely fictional. She is shaped after a real mother who lost her son - Sohrab - after the 2009 protests. Amir, in an interview with Andisheh TV, stated that: “one would be able to see the grief and sorrow of the whole Iranian nation in her face” (Khodayari, 2013). He believes that “no mother should lose her child because of partaking in an election” (Khodayari, 2013). The author of *Zahra’s Paradise* intended to show the public the sort of “sorrow and pain, which Iranians are suffering from” (Khodayari, 2013).

The graphic novel *Zahra's Paradise* and the Vote4Zahra website have been paired with the intention to improve the domestic condition of Iran. A digital version of the book has been on the Vote4Zahra website since 2011. On the verge of the 2013 election, Zahra was presented as the best choice to run as a female candidate in view of her popularity and her motivations. The only discrepancy between *Zahra's Paradise* and the website campaign is that the book was mostly engaged with "Zahra's suffering under the Islamic government policies in Iran, whereas, the website is the story of hope" (Khodayari, 2013). According to Firuzeh Mahmoudi, Zahra becomes empowered through her experience and decides to build a bridge of hope. In one part of the campaign, she resolves to forget all her sorrow and tries to compensate for the future. Elsewhere Mahmoudi and her colleagues try to bring together all those who wish to "vote for human rights, vote for democracy and vote for a type of Iran which cannot be found in the views of present male candidates" (Khodayari, 2013). The symbol used during the campaign is very similar to the famous Zorro sign, thus suggesting Zahra may be some sort of a masked saviour of Iranian citizens. The whole story of Zahra eventually proves a movement designed to question the bases of the Islamic Republic.

By presenting Zahra as a presidential candidate, Mahmoudi and her colleagues express criticism towards the legal constraints restricting women's action in Iranian politics. Zahra is the only female candidate left, and, due to her fictionality, the only one who is safe from the Iranian Guardian Council's disqualifications.<sup>185</sup> According to Sadeghi (2012), the post-election events "will come to be remembered as unique in that it was not only advanced by women, but also provided an opportunity for them, alongside men, to defy social attitudes toward gender, and patriarchal arbitrary rule over the country in unprecedented ways" (p. 135). The fact that "women cannot be president in Iran" is one adding considerable fuel to the public debate on Iran:

A member of Iran's constitutional watchdog group insists that women cannot be presidential candidates, a report said Thursday, effectively killing the largely symbolic bids by about 30 women seeking to run in the June 14 election. Even before the comments by Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi, chances for a woman candidate in Iran's presidential election were considered nearly impossible. Women also have registered as potential candidates in past presidential elections, but the group that vets hopefuls appears to follow interpretations of the constitution that suggest only a man may hold Iran's highest elected office.

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<sup>185</sup> "The Council of Guardians consists of twelve jurists, all of whom are required to have achieved sufficient training in religious jurisprudence. Six of the Council's members are appointed by the Supreme Leader from among the clerical elite. While the remaining six are nominated by the judiciary and voted on by the Majlis. The Council of Guardians is responsible for interpreting the constitution and ensures that legislation passed by the Majlis is consistent with Islamic law and the Constitution of the Islamic Republic. In addition, the Council is responsible for approving any presidential, parliamentary, and Assembly of Experts nominees before their names can appear on the ballot" (Alexander and Hoenig, 2008, p. 17).



Women, however, are cleared to run for Iran's parliament and have served as lawmakers (*Huffington Post World*, 2013).<sup>186</sup>

The statement of Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi, a member of the Guardian Council, is controversial. According to Axworthy, "in Western countries it is normal for people not to have very much reliable information about Iran, and yet for certain aspects of Iran to be familiar. There are things about Iran that are striking and memorable" (2013, p. xxii) such as the rights of women to become president or occupying any political position which is considered as a man-only job. Let us see what Iranian sources say.

The Arabic word "*rijal*" is the plural of the noun 'man', a general term which also includes women and therefore best translated as "humanity", "human beings". This is used in official Farsi texts as well: "According to the laws, the president is chosen from the religious and political *rijal*"<sup>187</sup> (Merh News Agency, 2013). The statement seems to reflect the *Huffington Post World* 2013 article. There are however important omissions. While there is a long tradition of *tafasir* that clearly state that women are not suitable for leadership positions, there is no reference in the Qur'an supporting this.<sup>188</sup> Ayatollah Ibrahim Amini,<sup>189</sup> a Shi'a scholar, in his *An Introduction to the Rights and Duties of Women in Islam*, wrote about women's rights to participate in the legislative process. He believes that men and women have equal rights to live in a society governed by laws they both contributed to implement. No one can deprive women of their right to legislate because of their sex (Amini, 2011, p. 214).

It is definite and certain that the society requires government. The prerequisite for enforcing laws is that there be a government that has the responsibility for bringing order to the society. Women and men alike, as citizens who have the

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<sup>186</sup> I have used this source as one easily available to the general public.

<sup>187</sup> The original Farsi text is translated by the author: (*Az meyan-e rijal-e mazhabi wa siyasi, yek nafar ke wajede sharayete zir bashad, entekhab mishawad*) (Mehr News Agency, 2013).

<sup>188</sup> There are many cases in which the Prophet of Islam took women to the battle and treated them as equal to men. Nusayba bint Kab was one of those women "who personally defended the Prophet in the Battle of Uhud but was not mandated to do so" (Amirebrahimi, 2012). Umm Ammarah was also another prominent example of a woman who played a major role during the Battle of Uhud. She took the sword, fought the enemies and defended the Prophet. "The Prophet was reportedly saying that whichever direction he turned his face, he saw Umm Ammarah fighting the enemies" (Deris, 2013). What we see in these examples is that the women in the time of the Prophet took action, offered their abilities and skills and were proactive female companions to the Prophet. As stated in the *Qur'an*: "Surely the Muslim men and the Muslim women, and the believing men and the believing women, and the devout men and the devout women, and the truthful men and the truthful women, and the patiently persevering men and the patiently persevering women, and the humble men and the humble women, and the almsgiving men and the almsgiving women, and the fasting men and the fasting women, and the men who guard their chastity and the women who guard, and the men who remember Allah much and the women who remember – Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a great reward" (33:35).

<sup>189</sup> Ayatollah Ibrahim Amini (b. 1925) is an Iranian-born Shi'a scholar and writer, Member and Vice-President of the Assembly of Experts (*Majlis-Khubrigan*), Secretary General of the Office and Educational Research Centre of the Assembly of Experts, Member of the Academic Council of the Religious Learning Centre of Qom, and Chief of Cultural Affairs, Member of the Board of Trustees of the World Centre for Islamic Sciences, Member of the Board of Trustees of Imam al-Sadiq University in Tehran, and Member of the Supreme Council of World Assembly of Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.). For more information, see <http://www.ibrahImamini.com/en>.

right to participate in choosing their futures, can have a part in the government and its determination. Naturally, presence in the prerequisites of this affair is also everyone's right. Establishment of unions and political parties, participations in various groups, taking part in elections and other political activities are several of the rights of all people, including women.[...], if women think of these things also, they shall be much more successful. The useless rivalry and separation between men and women must not be provoked. While preserving religious and legal criteria, women must act in the interests of the whole society and all humans (Amini, 2011, pp. 214-215).

While he does not say that women can become presidents, he notes the rights of women to participate in politics and hold governmental positions. If nothing in the Qur'an and Shi'ism prevents a woman to become president, why do the Iranian constitutional laws (which are claimed to be based on *shari'ah*) not allow this? Interpreters of the law have read *rijal* literally, i.e. "men", "male human beings" as opposed to *nisā*, "women", "female human beings". Alternatively, they see presidency as governmental supreme authority, and not executive authority. In both case only *rijal*, and not *nisā*, can be presidents.

Arabic terms such as *rijal* are used in official Farsi texts to show their Islamic disposition. If so, *rijal* in "its figurative and allegorical meaning refers to prominent and outstanding characteristics in religion and politics" (Shahed, 2011). This clearly means that all those figures who are religiously or politically proactive can become president, irrespective of their gender, as per article 115 of the Iranian constitutional laws: "The president should be from the religious and political *rijal*" (Shahed, 2011). As a matter of fact, if the legislators wished to close down the doors of misconception and misunderstanding, why did they not use the Farsi word *mard* (man) instead? At the time of issuing this law, a group of *olama* and *foqaha*, members of the constituent assembly, discussed both *rijal* and *mard*. Since *mard* was unambiguously referring to the male gender, they rejected it. The word *rijal* was used instead to leave the negotiation open for the future. By that time, since there was no suitable female candidate, the bill was defeated. This ratified decree in no way means that a woman does not have the right to become president in Iran; rather, it is accepted that upon demonstrating religious and political qualifications, the doors are open for women to take this responsibility (Shahed, 2011).

In line with the orientalist critique, Zahra's candidacy, Narayan believes, is communicating the oppressions of a culture and thus "reinforces, however unconsciously, Western prejudices about the 'superiority' of Western culture" (Narayan, 2004, p. 216). Therefore, one must take double precautions when being critical of a culture and religion in

that it might “conflict with their desire as members of once colonized cultures<sup>190</sup> to affirm the value of the same culture and traditions” (Narayan, 2004, p. 216). As mentioned before, Muslim accounts are overwhelmingly quoted in reporting contexts when they are critical of their own culture and religion (Poole and Richardson, 2006, p. 115). Decentring “Western” hegemonic discourses will shift the focus of discussions on “Islamic fundamentalism” and women’s oppression under it.

According to Sam Harris, the “West” does not seem to be at war with “fundamentalism” or terrorism in Islam, “but with ‘Islam itself’, with ‘the vision of life that is prescribed to all Muslims in the Koran’. The distinction between moderate and fundamentalist Muslim is irrelevant because most Muslims appear to be ‘fundamentalist’ in the Western sense of the word” (as cited in Nash, 2012, p. 9). Equating all forms of Islam with terrorism or fundamentalism is the provenance of orientalism. Orientalism, as Said points out, only provides a “reading of Others, especially Islam, as a list of ‘absences’ - capitalism, cities, civil society, democracy etc. – and the transfer of the West’s anxieties of the Orient” (Nash, 2012, p. 16). According to Said, orientalism, in its dominant position, is capable of revealing the ‘truth’ about the past and present of “Eastern” cultures more authentically than the “Easterners” themselves. The de-contextualisation of the “non-Western” religious politics not only helps the orientalists to justify their actions but it also “weakens the resistance of ‘the Other’ as they change the way in which ‘the Other’ views itself” (Said as cited in Marandi, 2009, p. 5). Discussing the Islamic system of Iranian government strictly from the point of view of “Western” political standards is likely to open the gates of misunderstanding and skewed interpretation. According to Shariatmadari (2013):

The revolution’s religious underpinning is hard for the secular West to comprehend. Islam is the wild card that puts Iran’s predicament beyond conventional analysis. Some claim that there is a tinge of irrationality in its decision making that makes it impossible to engage with in the usual way.

In the process of de-contextualisation, what usually happens is that the truth is sacrificed through mentioning quickly or focusing on other issues. In Marandi’s words, “facts are sometimes stated and then buried in a mass of information, and at times misinformation” (2009, p. 6). Popular knowledge on the issue of women’s rights to run for political positions in Iran is thus affected by incomplete understanding, or misunderstanding, of the set of rules

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<sup>190</sup> According to Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi (1994), Iran has never been under direct colonisation. However, the “increasingly visible signs of economic and cultural dependency and a growing myth of foreign involvement were strong causal factors” for a revolution (p. xvii).

regulating Iran.<sup>191</sup> According to Geaves (2004), “orientalism can be described as the corporate institution for dealing with the Muslim world- making statements about it, authorising views of it, describing it, settling it and ruling over it, either by force, economic power relations or intellectual ownership” (p. 66). After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the political and cultural tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims in the “West” have been exacerbated. In subsequent years, as the crisis between “Islam and the West” seems to have risen up, the use of orientalist clichés has arguably intensified this crisis (Geaves et al., 2004). The most important reason behind skewed understanding of Islam or Iran is the lack of unbiased knowledge. Reports on Islam and Iran are mostly decontextualized, and are imbued with decades of anti-Iranian propaganda.

Dabashi believes that “the Green Movement is not a revolution in the classic sense of the term - it is not violent, and it is not targeted to dismantle the ruling regime” (2013). The protesters were against both the current government policies and the former bankrupt profiteers of Iran. Furthermore, they highlighted a number of issues:

The categorical instance on the territorial integrity of Iran; repeated insistence against economic sanctions crippling the daily lives of millions of Iranians; opposition to covert operations or military strikes against Iran; against separatist movements; adamant about its non-violent disposition; opposition to any measure or movement that endangers the well-being of Iranians; insistence on dialogue, on the cultivation of public reason, on cleansing the system (2013).

In Dabashi’s words, the protesters were actually opposing the policies against Iran such as the international imposed sanctions and the war threats (2013). Disregarding the agenda of the Green Movement, “Western” media have portrayed the post-election events as a reaction and noted that “Iran’s 2009 ‘election’ fielded only regime-vetted candidates and was stolen, and that the reigning administration is ‘increasingly fascistic’” (Brown in *The Guardian*, 2012).<sup>192</sup> The conclusion it reaches is that the Iranian government had manipulated the results

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<sup>191</sup> To clarify this point further, I would like to take an example from *The Revolutionary Iran* (2013) of Michael Axworthy. The cover of the book is designed in an attractive way that would catch every one’s eyes and attention. It is an image of a young woman with a not-properly-fixed *hejab* on. She is making the victory sign with her fingers while her face is half covered. The first perception of such an image seems to intensify the cliché of a Muslim veiled woman reacting to Islamic oppression. Particularly when it comes to Iran, the immediate message that comes to mind is the issue of compulsory veiling, violation of which carries a legal punishment. The picture of a young woman with her face half covered showing the sign of victory could simply imply the reform movement of Iranian women against the policies of the government. However, the picture was taken during the 2009 post-election events in Iran. Axworthy writes in the caption that: “this woman has covered the lower part of her face not for religious reasons, but to avoid identification by authorities and security forces. The *hejab* in Iran normally leaves the whole face open” (Axworthy, 2013, p. 346 & book cover). With such a simple explanation, Axworthy shatters initial preconceptions.

<sup>192</sup> In another example of such representation, *The Times* in 2009 wrote: “Within hours of the polls closing in Iran’s turbulent election, the clerical establishment declared President Ahmadinejad the winner - not just by a credible razor-thin majority but by an absurd and falsified two thirds of the vote. The attempt to impart a veneer of democratic legitimacy to a regime widely hated for its authoritarian intolerance, economic incompetence and corruption backfired (*The Times*, 2009).

to keep Ahmadinejad in his former position. The reality is more complex. The votes were divided by districts. According to El-Nawawy, “much of [Ahmadinejad’s] support comes from poorer and more religious sections of Iran’s rapidly growing population particularly outside Tehran (Who’s Who 2009)” (El-Nawawy, 2010, p. 3). Further to that, many religious Shi’as in Iran supported Ahmadinejad for his continuation of Khomeini’s “anti-Western”/anti-imperialist policies. According to Axworthy (2013), “many Iranians supported his strong stance against the West and in favour of Iran’s right to a civil nuclear programme” (p. 404). To this one should add that most media reporters were based in Tehran and especially North Tehran, which hosts the more urbanised and “Westernised” population who were supporting Mousavi. The long queues of voters broadcasted by TV channels were from these areas mainly. The votes of the northern sectors of Tehran were counted first and, as expected, they showed an overwhelming support for Ahmadinejad’s opposition.

### **Representations of Iranian prisons in *Persepolis* and epigones**

Many Iranian intellectuals have articulated a body of strong arguments against the current and previous situation of political prisoners. Satrapi too does so by telling the story of her uncle Anoosh, a prisoner under the Shah who was allegedly assassinated under the Islamic government.<sup>193</sup> In the chapter “The Heroes”, Satrapi talks about Siamak Jari (b. 1945), her mother’s best friend’s husband, and Mohsen Shakiba (b. 1947) a revolutionary communist. Both were released in March 1979 and talked about their torture experiences<sup>194</sup> in prison. In these vignettes, Satrapi (2003) details the situation in Iranian prisons and mentions the murders of various family friends: Ahmadi was tortured with a hot iron and after his death cut into pieces (p. 52); Mohsen was drown in his bathtub; Siamak could not be found and his sister was killed in his stead (p. 66). After Siamak and Mohsen, it was uncle Anoosh’s turn to be arrested and executed with the accusation of being a USSR spy (p. 70).

Satrapi’s illustrations of the situation of Iranian prisoners and their destiny in prisons have been read as a form of orientalism by a number of Iranian officials and scholars. Marandi, for instance, states that because of the current market for such memoirs in the “West”, the prisoners’ situations were sensationalised and eroticised with baseless and self-referencing reports (2009, p. 35). According to Marandi (2009), “one indispensable ingredient of

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<sup>193</sup> According to Matin-Asgari “during its first two years, the new regime executed 757 individuals, mostly charged with ‘sowing corruption on earth’. About two-thirds of these were political cases, mostly individuals tied to the old regime” (2006, p. 701).

<sup>194</sup> Satrapi’s uncle describes his prison experiences to his niece: “You remember the day they pulled out my nails? They have grown back since. Not in a normal way ... but at least I have them. Our torturers received special training from the C.I.A. - real scientists!!! They knew each part of the body. They knew where to hit! Look! On your soles there are nerves that lead directly to the brain. They whipped me with thick electric cables so much that this looks like anything but a foot. Not to mention putting out their cigarettes on our backs” (Satrapi, 2003, p. 51).

Orientalist discourse, old and new, is the eroticizing of the East” (p. 33). In his views, claims of rape and sexual abuses are quite ample in memoirs on Iran as a “sort of modernized version of the old Orientalist fantasies about the depraved East” (p. 35). In *Persepolis*, Satrapi’s mum talks about the destiny of virgin girls in Iranian prisons.

You know what they do to the young girls they arrest? You know what happened to Niloufar? The girl you met at Khosro’s house? [...] you know that it’s against the law to kill a virgin ... so a guardian of the Revolution marries her ... and takes her virginity before executing her. Do you understand what that means??? If someone so much as touches a hair on your head, I’ll kill him!” said Satrapi’s mother (Satrapi, 2003, p. 145).

Her reasoning is that:

Traditionally when a girl gets married, the husband is supposed to pay her a dowry. If the girl dies, the husband has to give the dowry to her family. That’s what happened with Niloufar. After she was executed, to make sure her awful fate was understood, they sent 500 Tumans to her parents. 500 Tumans for the life and virginity of an innocent girl” (Satrapi, 2003, p. 146).

When Satrapi’s parents decide to send her abroad for the first time, her mother convinces young Marji that if she stays and continues arguing with her teachers, she could be jailed, an event which may lead to various forms of violence and the death of her daughter. In such a framework, the emphasis on such representations might be rooted in Satrapi’s *Islam setizi* (her belief in the separation of religion and the state) or simply in her being an outsider (due to her secular “Westernised” lifestyle).

Illustrations of rape and violations of human rights are observable in *Zahra’s Paradise* (2011, p. 108). In chapter 9, “Kahrizak”, Amir portrays a similar vignette. When Ali, Mehdi’s friend from jail, is released, Hasan, Mehdi’s elder brother, comes to see him. At this time, (Mehdi was still alive in the prison) Ali tells Hasan that Mehdi has been tortured and raped, and explains the terrible situation of prisoners *vis-à-vis* the martyrs of Karbala.<sup>195</sup> In this comparison, the prison guards are made to resemble Yazid’s soldiers. He describes how badly the prisoners were beaten and wounded, and when they asked for some water, either they were refused, or a glass of water was poured on the ground in front of their eyes (Amir & Khalil, 2011, p. 102).

In the above mentioned examples, information about the Iranian prisons is dramatized by the author. Marandi believes, “these texts work within a single Western Orientalist

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<sup>195</sup> The toughest part of the Ashura tragedy was that the Imam, his family and followers were deprived of water until they were all martyred. Yazid’s soldiers did not even have mercy on the six-month-old baby of Hossain. He (Ali Asghar, son of Imam Hossain) was martyred while he was crying for milk in his father’s hands. Ali compared this scene in which he and other prisoners suffered from thirst and tiredness to that of Karbala.

discourse of demonization, where Iran is guilty until proven otherwise” (2009, p. 34). Based on second hand information, and other biased mal-documented claims, Satrapi and others have been accused of ‘eroticizing’ the Iranian prisons rather than reflecting the accurate events. This is one of the significant ingredients of the orientalist discourse according to Marandi (2009, p. 33). Nash also shows that Nafisi<sup>196</sup> in her *Reading Lolita in Tehran* angles her satire towards the same issue by stating that “it is a truth universally acknowledged that a Muslim man, regardless of his fortune, must be in want of a nine-year-old-virgin wife” (2012, p. 57). “Satrapi’s version of this ‘philosophy’ is somewhat [similar]. According to her, ‘it’s against the law to kill a virgin so a guardian of the revolution marries her and takes her virginity before executing her’” (Marandi, 2009, p. 34). In Marandi’s words, although there is no sound proof to this, it seems that this “does not decrease the authenticity of the ‘memoir’ in the eyes of many Western critics. She can make wild and often contradictory accusations and still seem authentic to much of her Western audience” (2009, p. 34). According to Nash, these autobiographers’ position, “avowed pro-Westernism” and “their wild fluctuations in response-from adoration to execration” (Nash, 2012, p. 57) – is to be situated within Iranian *gharbzadeh* – Westoxicated intellectuals who are considered “to be Iran’s intoxication with the West” (Lesevot, 2011, p. 120). As the result, Iran has been demonised and Satrapi and others’ narratives “depict a grim tragicomedy in which a succession of Muslim Malvolios blindly and contemptuously espouse and erect a regime of virtuous dogmatism with no regard for persons, place or time” (Nash, 2012, p. 57).

Quite opposite to what Marandi and Nash argued regarding the position of Satrapi as an outsider or her mal-documented evidences, for many in the “West”, she is considered as an “insider” who supposedly knows more than her audiences about Iran, and is trusted and accepted as a reliable source of information. In discussions of *Persepolis*, *Zahra’s Paradise* and other memoirs, there is a tendency to regard the personal accounts of Satrapi and other autobiographers as experiences they never had before, and thus objecting to them as not reflecting eyewitness accounts. The challenge that autobiographies face is the process of innovation and structuration, which is an extension of the fact and fiction discussion. It is argued that “in an era when absolute truth claims are under assault”, how can an autobiographer make “a case for an essentially reciprocal relationship between the truth of what happened and the truth of how it is remembered”? (Hathaway, 2011, p. 251). Especially, Leigh warns us that one needs to pay double attention when encountering the literalizing report

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<sup>196</sup> According to Nafisi, “it seems that all religious men, child abusers, sexually obsessed, ‘perverts’ and that their female counterparts are just as evil and carry out ‘sexual assaults’. In their religious ceremonies, Nafisi can feel ‘a wild, sexually flavoured frenzy in the air’ and when the millions of Iranians who took part in the funeral ceremony of Ayatollah Khomeini were sprayed at intervals with water to cool them off because of the extreme heat, Nafisi claims that ‘the effect made the scene oddly sexual’” (as cited in Marandi, 2009, p. 33).

“of sexual violence because sexual storytelling is a complicated process; it necessarily and appropriately combines fantasy with memory” (2001, p. 26).

The study of autobiography has shown that there is no fixed definition for it as many critics have not often considered it as a genre at all. “Autobiography is a threshold genre. It traces and crosses boundaries between fact and fiction, memory and history, selves and others, images and texts-sometimes drawing these distinctions, but more often blurring them” (Doring, 2006, p. 72). Paul de Man for example, argued that “empirically as well as theoretically, autobiography lends itself poorly to generic definition” and also according to Avrom Fleishman “since autobiography is not generically distinguished by formal constituents, linguistic register, or audience effects, it therefore has no history as a genre” (Eakin, 1989, p. viii). Based on this discussion, one would address the principal limitations of it. According to Lejeune “autobiography is above all a *narrative*, which follows in time the *story* of an individual” (as cited in Eakin, 1989, p. xi). This can jeopardise the sense of authenticity in autobiographies. In fact, the relation of autobiography and fiction has never been an easy one. In a complementary function, Eakin believes “the narrative is us, our identities” (Eakin, 2008, p. 3). Eakin proposed a “dynamic relation between narrative and identity, for narrative is not only a literary form but part of the fabric of our lived experience” (2008, p. 2). “When it comes to our identities, narrative is not merely about self, but it is rather in some profound way a constituent part of self” (Eakin, 2008, p. 2). The most prominent debate in this regard is “the concept of sincerity, which is at once the *sine qua non* of autobiography as a genre and a sterile problematic” (Eakin, 1989, p. ix).

According to Elliott, “postmemory is by its very nature a fantastic re-creation rather than an accurate reflection” (2003, p. 5). Imagining and witnessing are self-referential in an autobiography and “who is the arbiter of autobiographical truth?” (Eakin, 2008, p. 20). In his *Maus*, Art Spiegelman was “confronted with an assemblage of raw material and challenged to create a coherent text out of it” (Hathaway, 2011, p. 253). *Maus* is a complex combination of photographic facts and evidences that retells Spiegelman’s father’s account of the Holocaust in Poland with a fantastic postmemory recreation. The story is stated through the representation of human characters as animals. A set of recorded interviews with family photographs were used to present his father’s memories. These evidences were mixed with Spiegelman’s fantasies. Hathaway argues that all the process of constructing an autobiography with all the elisions, selections and compressions are quite necessary in shaping a piece of art. Spiegelman confirms that his work was not just a mere representation of what he heard or saw or found out, but his main concern was giving a shape to all his experiences. This shape giving can be risky as it might distort the authenticity and the underlying reality. “Perhaps the only honest way to present such material is to say: Here are all the documents I used... and here’s



like thousands of hours of tape recording, a bunch of photographs to look at. Now, go make yourself a *Maus*!” (Spiegelman, 2011, p. 34).

Similarly, the feature of ‘interpreting’ the events cannot be detached from *Persepolis* due to the nature of fictionalised autobiography. Based on the discussions of ‘graphic narrative’ by Chute (2008), Satrapi’s images tend to interpret more than report. She uses the term “graphic narrative” instead of graphic novel to refer to her work as she believes that Satrapi’s *Persepolis* is claiming its own historicity- even as she works to “destabilize standard narratives of history” (Chute, 2008, p. 1). Chute’s argument is sound advice. Graphic novel or even graphic narrative as a generic label does not exactly fit Satrapi’s work. It is true that *Persepolis* is partly a fiction and based on Spiegelman’s declaration it is impossible to tell a story without any extra elements. However, the historical points raised by Satrapi “are concerned with depicting the complex relationships among personal histories and larger ‘official’ histories” (Hathaway, 2011, p. 249). This shows how events shaped Satrapi’s story at the same time Satrapi tried to shape her story. Indeed, *Persepolis* literally illustrates how history and the public culture work through in a way which was out of Satrapi’s control. The author’s personal experiences are closely tied within larger historical and cultural contexts. Eakin believes that “autobiography is definitely a referential art: it self-consciously, usually explicitly, positions itself with reference to the world, and when it does so, it invites –at least potentially- the kind of scrutiny” (Eakin, 2008, p. 21).

The controversy surrounding the situation of political prisoners as described by Amir in *Zahra’s Paradise* represents a breaking point in this discussion. As Amir declared in one of his interviews that, he had listened to stories of violence in Iranian prisons (Amir in *Jadaliyya*, 2011), the reliability of his account in terms of eyewitness testimony becomes significant. Amir’s case could be compared to Spiegelman’s experience of the Holocaust. Spiegelman was born when his parents had already survived the Holocaust. By the time of authoring his work, Spiegelman has a collection of stories and images shared with him by different people over a long period of time. His case is similar to Amir’s, who is narrating the story of Hassan’s brother a few years later. Elliott believes that *Maus* had been partly created by Spiegelman as a “kind of identification with the victims of the Holocaust- to remember their stories and sympathise with them” (2003, p. 43). This process of identification is only manageable and possible with fictionality. With the emphasis on the difference between third person’s representation of the past from the first person recalling it, Elliott argues that fictionality would make it possible to depict the “unspeakable crimes while avoiding the voyeuristic exploitation of a more realistic mode of visual representation” (Elliott, 2003, p. 44). Consequently, the element of fictionality seems to be unavoidable in the genre of memoir and failure to properly comprehend this in

consideration of the form of a graphic novel or a genre of a literary memoir might cause a narrative to be read and interpreted in a fashion similar to a news report.

### **Trauma fiction**

Autobiographers need readers to share their 'losses'. Iranian memoirs post the Islamic Revolution subjectively engage with "a process of historical revision and a time of trauma and loss and cataclysmic social change" (Whitlock, 2008, p. 8). These memoirs take different forms, and due to their traumatic accounts of the revolution became highly popular in the "West". *Persepolis* emerged in the highly critical moment that was a key watershed in the successful publication of the book.<sup>197</sup> As mentioned above, Satrapi illustrates her traumatic life experience under the revolution and the subsequent war. In one of her interviews with *Mother Jones* (2008), she declares that: "the image that I have of Iran today is mixed so much with my melancholy and my nostalgia that I can't have a fair point of view" (Satrapi in Walt, 2008). Traumatic experiences are powerful motivators. According to Satrapi, "the depression is like a motor for creation. I need a little bit of depression, a bit of acid in my stomach, to be able to create. When I'm happy I just want to dance" (Satrapi as cited in Hattenstone, *The Guardian*, 2008). Accordingly, Whitlock argues, the melancholic mood of narratives raise important concerns about "the commodification of suffering, gendered discourses of trauma, the transmission of cultural memory across generations, and the circulation and authorisation of trauma story" (2008, p. 9).

There are different arguments regarding traumatic autobiographies. Cathy Caruth in her *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* defines "the structure of trauma as a disruption of history or temporality" (Whitehead, 2004, p. 12). In her opinion, "the traumatic event is not experienced or assimilated fully at the time that it occurs, but only belatedly in its insistent and intrusive return, and hence is not available in the usual way to memory and interpretation" (Whitehead,

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<sup>197</sup> "The political topicality of *Persepolis* played an important role in its success" (Barzegar 2012, p. 1). Its international success can be attributed to the fact that the story was based on the contemporary political history of Iran, that is to say in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Satrapi, in an interview with Weiss (n. d.) informed us of the reasons behind her mean of expression: "I made one film in animation, and the reason was because I thought it was the most appropriate form for *Persepolis*. Given the specific story of *Persepolis*, which had to do with the modern history of Iran, I think if I put it in a geographical place with some type of human being people would say, "Oh, this is a story of the Third World people, they're far from us, we don't get it," and I thought there was something about the structure of the drawing that meant anyone could identify with it" (Satrapi in Weiss, n. d.). Just like Satrapi, Barzegar believes that one of the significant points of *Persepolis* is that, it provides its audiences with an "accurate time-table portrayal of the political events that took place from 1979 to 1984 - a chaotic and turbulent time in Iran's modern history" (Barzegar, 2012, p. 1). Chute (2008) agrees that the book's success should be placed in its "political topicality" (p. 108). In other words, although what has made *Persepolis* at the centre of world attention was the form of graphic novel and the child language narrative device, it was this 'political topicality' that has had wide appeal with worldwide audiences. The Iranian government too condemned the work as *Islam setiz* and anti-Iranian due to its 'political topicality'.

2004, p. 12). Therefore, according to Whitehead, there is no doubt that recounting everything from the very beginning to the end “is not straightforwardly referential” in a traumatic account (p. 13). This highlights the borders between fiction and fact as well as the subjectivity and objectivity of the account. The “fact” itself is an interpretative process both in reading and writing, so it seems more reasonable to use “faction” according to Lloyd Ridgeon to describe the genre of memoir.

As far as traumatic literature is concerned, it is argued that the author’s memory is liable to decay and deterioration in trauma narrative. In other words, in discussions about fact and fiction, it is acknowledged that producing a fact is influenced by the debates about trauma and memory. This is confirmed by Leigh too. “The development of the traumatic memory impacts on self-representation” (Leigh, 2001, p. 25). Furthermore, according to Primo Levi, “human memory is a marvellous but a fallacious instrument, liable to deterioration and decay, especially in the wake of a catastrophic experience” (as cited in Whitehead, 2004, p. 30). However, despite the unreliability of the memory at the time of the trauma, many authors defend the accuracy of testimonies through justification of its nature. For example, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub describe testimony as “fragmented and broken in form, composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance” (1992, p. 5). There is a joint reality between the empathetic listener and the traumatic story teller. “On the part of the listener, there is a necessary emotional investment in the testimony. The trauma returns in disjointed fragments and the role of the listener is to move quietly and decisively in bringing things together” (Whitehead, 2004, p. 34). Such a function is not riskless for the listener, who is modifying the trauma of the story teller. “The listener to trauma comes to be a participant and co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself” (Felman and Dori, 1992, p. 57). Amir’s work, in my opinion, creates the process of testimony in the presence of a listener i.e. the story retold by Amir crafted to seek external support for improvement of human rights in Iran (Amir in *Jadaliyya*, 2011). Amir’s testimony might be fragmented or influenced by the trauma or memory defects. Moreover, the listeners’ participation would cause extra manipulation in reading and understanding his memoir. This largely reminds us, just like Satrapi’s case, that Amir wrote a genre of autobiography or a genre of interpretation which is different from reporting.

Memory shortfall could be related to the use of a child’s narrative technique in autobiographies. Satrapi’s narrative technique acts as a powerful weapon to affect the reader. A child’s language with its simplicity, purity and innocence can “increases identification with the protagonist, because the reader is naturally inclined to feel more sympathy for the experiences of a young child” (Whitehead, 2004, p. 38). Readers can see the loss and

disorientation of the author in the mirror of child's perspective. Mostly, they have the same feelings and reflections towards the event being mirrored by the child. A child's perspective can familiarise a strange event and would also be able to defamiliarise the familiar "because a child is liable to notice details and is not always able to interpret what is going on around him", therefore, he is just purely reporting the events as they happened before his eyes (Whitehead, 2004, p. 38). This way of reporting is matter-of-factly very trustable, as the child might not really understand what was going on. Satrapi's autobiography is the story of a childhood. By using little Marji as the narrator of *Persepolis* in the first part of the book, "the reader is meant to feel her emotions in order to understand her story" (Meier, 2009). Speaking like a child favours a critical tone, hyperboles, exaggeration, the deployment of a Manichean logic,<sup>198</sup> and provokes condoning reactions. When Marji talks about the tortures of Siamak Jari and other family friends, she elaborates on the use of iron as a tool of torture. "I have never imagined that you could use that appliance for torture" (Satrapi, 2003, p. 51). In another vignette, Satrapi uses hyperbole in representing a man cut into pieces. Satrapi's visualising of this scene is a "moment of defamiliarization (a child's image of torture) in which one recognizes not only the inadequacy of any representation to such traumatic history, but also, more significant, the simultaneous power of the radically inadequate (the child's naïve confusion)" (Chute, 2008, p. 4). In Chute's words, *Persepolis* simultaneously comments on "the insufficiency of any representation to fully represent trauma and also harness the power of the visual to represent an important emotional landscape, which is moving paradoxically because of its distance from and proximity to the realities it references" (Chute, 2008, p. 4). Little Marji in *Persepolis*, sometimes, simplifies the situation due to her childish point of view. "This shows the complex emotions and reactions Satrapi wants the reader to have through a child's perspective" (Meier, 2009). In another vignette, she says: "at the age of six, I was already sure I was the last prophet. This was a few years before the revolution" (Satrapi, 2003, p. 6). This is also an emotion-evoking tone of a child that is unavoidable. Therefore, because of this overly simplistic technique – a child's perspective – the story does not seem to accord to "fact but reflects an inner or subjective truth" (Whitehead, 2004, p. 32). In other words, *Persepolis* teaches us that retracing and representing a traumatic event does not need to be necessarily traumatic. Through using a child as a protagonist, "Satrapi shows us that certain modes of representation depict historical trauma more effectively, and more horrifically, than does realism (in part

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<sup>198</sup> Manicheanism was founded by the Persian prophet Mani in the Sasanian epoch (216-276 CE). (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2013). According to Baker-Brian (2011), Manicheanism is "a simplistic state of affairs, in which two opposing agendas are set against one another" (p. 1). "The Manichean dichotomy, seeing things in black and white, is always dogmatic and intolerant – in short, reactionary - - whereas he who avoids set figure, who recognizes nuances and distinctions and who admits contradictions is democratic" (Eco, 1979, p. 162). There are also some elements of Otherisation and racism in Manicheanism based on the theories of Fanon. See Gibson, 1999, pp. 337-364.

because they are able to do justice to the self-consciousness that traumatic representation demands)” (Chute, 2008, p. 4). This is the reason that *Persepolis* can be “read as a historical testimony” referring to its technique in using a child’s perspective (Whitehead, 2004, p. 40).

Based on Whitehead’s argument, representing the emotion-evoking childhood and confusing traumatic moments can be filled with lies, hiding the truth or changing a part of it. If the reader has a feeling that “the autobiographer hides or alters a part of the truth, s/he might think that he is lying” (Signes in Miller, 2007, p. 539). Other trauma theorists have similar views. They differentiate between identification with traumatic experience and empathy towards it. In the latter instance, the response to trauma “is combined with cognition, argument and critical judgement” while in the former, there is no “critical or emotional distance” (Whitehead, 2004, p. 35). In another word, in the process of identification, there is always this hazard of losing the critical eye. Eakin (1989) believes that the narration of a child needs going beyond the verisimilitude of autobiography and enter the realm of fiction (p. 53). In this case, the role of memory is less significant than reconstructing the child’s perspective. The autobiographer is so much concerned with the artistic construction of a child’s perspective that he forgets about the experiences. Also, the major problem of a child’s narrative technique is the naturally “biased, one-sided portrayals” of different personalities and his relationship with them (Hathaway, 2011, p. 252). For example, in the case of *Persepolis*, little Marji, can be argued, to have failed to portray the revolutionary guards impartially. However, Dave Eggers argues that “the author doesn’t have the energy or, more important, skill, to fib about this being anything other than him telling you about things, and is not a good enough liar to do it in any competently sublimated narrative way” (Eggers, 2001, p. xix-xx). In general, fiction draws upon the child narrator because the child’s voice is seen as ‘pure’ or ‘uncontaminated’ from social conditioning processes – innocent. Accordingly, Meier believes that “Satrapi’s purpose is not to show the reader the whole truth, nor is it to lie to the reader. The purpose was merely to shift the paradigms, if only temporarily, by which Iran is judged” (Meier, 2009). Interestingly, in framing Satrapi’s work as a traumatic memoir, based on the above discussions, *Persepolis* breaks what has been termed as “trauma” (2004, p. 7). The language of *Persepolis* is therefore that of humour and sarcasm. According to Chambers (2013), actually it is “its humour that would sell the memoir, rather than the serious discussion of Islam and multiculturalism” (p. 8); e.g. Marji calls her mum a “Dictator!” She continues: “You are the guardian of the revolution of this house!” (Satrapi, 2003, p. 113).

Basically, all additional support to provide evidence in an autobiography from interviewing, recording, photographing or transcribing can “only at best create a ‘partial truth’ both in and from their fieldwork, the most ethical thing to do is to acknowledge and continually point out the subjectivity of the entire process” (Hathaway, 2011, p. 255). *Persepolis* and other

works discussed so far “continue to baffle those who need to find one generic pigeonhole for it, but that elusiveness is also the source of its continued narrative power” (Hathaway, 2011, p. 256). In approaching autobiographies in general, one must move beyond the borders of the “true/false-dichotomy in semantic analysis” (Doring, 2006, p. 71). According to Hathaway, this suggests that a label like novel or autobiography or fiction cannot do justice in defining the story of individuals. In Doring’s words, “autobiographies, in this perspective, are primarily performative texts: they are not just descriptive, but productive; in other words, they *do* things with words. What they are doing can be characterised as self-formation by self-formulation” (2006, p. 71). According to Doring, the autobiographers turn into the author of their own selves by telling their stories. “Autobiography has always offered people a means of turning from being the subjects of discourse to being the subjects *in* discourse” (Doring, 2006, p. 72). Regarding the elements of fiction, it would be safer to approach works of Satrapi and others as a ‘self-reflexive autobiography’.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter provided an overview of the analysis of autobiographical narratives, looking at different stereotypes i.e. fictional, semi-fictional and non-fictional, and the views of various autobiographers. The focus of the chapter was on the uniqueness of the autobiography as a threshold genre to include discussions of fact/fiction, memory/history, selves/others and images/texts. Through a correct understanding of the fluid and dynamic nature of autobiography rather than a fixed personal and subjective framework, one would be able to disengage the *intentio lectoris* from the dogmatism and fallacy of clichés and partial tendencies of orientalist or occidental representations of autobiographies. In a comparative study of Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* with those of Satrapi’s *Persepolis* and its epigones in consequence, it is reasonably safe to assert that these works cannot be boxed as either fact or fiction.

The autobiographies discussed so far received more negative criticisms concerning the issues of authenticity and sincerity. The concept of sincerity is argued to be the *sin qua non* of autobiographies, however, a complex combination of re-creation and reflection is inevitable for photographic facts and evidences to be reconstructed with elisions and selections. Recounting memories of a father who survived the Holocaust, and the traumatic situation of prisoners without being one is a dynamic process of identification with the victims through fictionality. This is unavoidable in the genre of the memoir and failure to considering it devoid of fictionality might cause confusion with media representations or news reports.

## CONCLUSION

*Persepolis* has been accused of *Islam setizi* (hostility against Islam) by Iranian officials and simultaneously it has been acclaimed by many scholars and celebrated by world media and publishing industries. In fact, it looks like Satrapi and *Persepolis* are caught in between an ideological, political, economic, anthropological and theological war between the “West”, chiefly USA and its allies, and Iran. The problem, however, is the debate on *Persepolis* itself and the lack of informed knowledge surrounding it. I have addressed this divergent reception by investigating Marjane Satrapi’s *intentio auctoris* and the message behind authoring *Persepolis*. This was done in the context of the investigation of Satrapi’s epigones as well as a number of selected post-revolutionary memoirs. As discussed, Satrapi’s main concerns in *Persepolis* are shared by other post-revolutionary authors. As Afary & Anderson (2005) in *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution* state: “they have been demanding a more liberal reading of the Islamic law; new civil liberties that clearly demarcate the boundaries between religion, state, and the individual; a more egalitarian concept of gender relations” (p. 172). They actually used a “humanist hermeneutic” (Nash, 2012, p. 63) to project the “Western” individuality and democracy as a weapon by which to expose the Islamic Republic’s enforcement of Islamic rules on citizens, practicing gender discrimination and its relationship with the phenomenon of modernity, and outside world. The comparative study of different post-revolutionary memoirs suggests a nuanced understanding of Satrapi’s intention and message -which is clearly dissimilar to that of other mentioned autobiographers- as well as the genre of memoir, and the existing debates about the boundaries between ‘factual’ and ‘fictional’ accounts.

Satrapi appears to be more aware than other autobiographers of the implications of falling into the language game of binaries. “The construction of fallacious images of Iran within Western minds has led Satrapi to suggest that Iran’s overwhelming image within Western media is of ‘women in *chadors* and guys with guns’”<sup>199</sup> (Goldin as cited in McIntosh, 2013, p. 3). Therefore, rather than encouraging the stereotypical presentations of her ‘beloved’ country, Satrapi de-centres such issues as men and women, Islam and feminism, “East” and “West”. Satrapi’s *Persepolis* has been authored, according to Leservot, to undermine the binary discourses of the “East” and the “West”. While she criticises the imposition of Islamic rules by ayatollahs in Iran, she also demonstrates an insight into the destructive effects of

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<sup>199</sup> Satrapi declares in one of her interviews: “when I arrived in France, I met many people who expected me to speak Arabic. So many Europeans do not know the difference between Arabs and Iranians. They don’t know anything of our centuries-old culture. They seem to think Iran has always been a country of religious fundamentalists. Iranian women either have no place in our society or that they are hysterical black crows. In fact, Iranian women are not downtrodden weeds” (Satrapi in Kutschera, 2002).

stereotypical and biased representations of her country and culture in the world media.<sup>200</sup> She condemns the revolutionary government in Iran for using and applying the religion as an instrument to legitimise their power, and therefore calls for the separation of individual and political lives as well as the religion from politics. Based on the hybrid identity of Satrapi discussed so far, her main concern is to differentiate between the identities of Iranian citizens from the Islamic Republic's government. This kind of social interactions and hybridity is evident in most of the Middle Eastern autobiographies, especially those which are on Iran (Chambers, 2013, p. 4). Jill Ker Conway believes "an autobiography is inspired by a myriad of factors including cultural, historical, political and personal influences and issues" (Conway, 2011). *Persepolis* is not an exception. In fact, *Persepolis* narrates Satrapi's childhood experiences and stories of coming of age, however, the story is inextricably linked with the social, religious and political transformations of Iran.

Apart from Satrapi's personal identity in her work, her *intentio auctoris* gives voice to her main concern which is the individual identity in Iran and social identity beyond Iran. The former refers to the collective socio-cultural and religious identity within Iran, i.e. lack of individuality in group identities (a "Westerner" in Iran, Satrapi, 2003, p. 274). While, the latter deals with the perception of Iran in the "West", i.e. nation of "fundamentalism" or terrorism or axis of evil (an Iranian in the "West", Satrapi, 2003, p. 274). Interestingly, McIntosh believes "*Persepolis*' purpose is heavily linked to identity" (2013, p. 1). Satrapi has consciously employed her identity along with that of her family and her country in service of her *intentio auctoris*, i.e. wiping off the misconceptions about her country by removing the gap between cultures (McIntosh, 2013, p. 1).<sup>201</sup> The rationale for writing *Persepolis* (according to Satrapi) was to show that Iran has a rich culture and heritage, and has a lot more to offer the world. This, however, is not what emerges from propagandistic media renditions of Iran. In fact, Satrapi's memoir is a collective identity. In other words, "Satrapi's identity is very much entwined within her relationship with others" (McIntosh, 2013, p. 1). She did not write her autobiography in a vacuum.

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<sup>200</sup> In one of her interviews, Satrapi noted that: "our perceptions of other countries and cultures are still largely formed by what we see in the media. In a time when more and more media outlets are being controlled by fewer people, these perceptions are often one-dimensional and rarely accurate" (Satrapi in Clarke, 2003).

<sup>201</sup> The concern is poignant, yet convincing, one. Iran is mostly discussed as a rogue country – as part of the axis of evil- to retain George W. Bush's infamous words. In one of her interviews with Powells (2006), she declared that her *Persepolis* is a new look at Iran, quite contrary to some other post-revolutionary memoirs that have only intensified the biased narrative on Iran: "I'd heard so many stupidities about my country since I left Iran. People had watched this stupid movie *Not Without My Daughter* [in which Sally Field plays an American who rescues her daughter from her estranged in-laws in Iran]; I heard so many things like that. I did not make *Persepolis* for Iranians. It was my answer to the rest of the world, to say, 'Let me give you another point of view'" (Satrapi in Dave, 2006).



According to Trinh T. Minh-ha, a group of autobiographers “want their words to be cries, life, capable of touching (other live things and beings) and being touched (being touched by the reader)” (1991, p. 140). As such, they try to overspill the borders between themselves and others “circulating within and being interpenetrated by broader social experiences” (Chambers, 2013, p. 4). In other words, in Susan Stanford Friedman’s words, there is no absolute or separate individualism. She believes “autobiographers who are women and members of minorities can’t help knowing that they also intimately share in a ‘collective identity’” (as cited in Miller, 2007, p. 544). This type of collective identity equals understanding oneself in relation to others such as one’s family, friends and relatives. “In an autobiography the relational is not optional. Autobiography’s story is about the web of entanglement in which we find ourselves, one that we sometimes choose” (Miller, 2007, p. 544). Therefore, Satrapi’s *intentio auctoris* ought to be understood in relation with her identity at public level within the Iranian society, its culture and history.

Apart from what was discussed so far regarding the personal and collective identities in *Persepolis*, it is interesting to know that Satrapi develops her own process of individual identity in order to make an effective critique to respond to the “Western” perceptions of Iranian identity (Madella, 2012, p. 4). In Iran, for example, she highlights her individual preferences in contrast with the public spheres of Iranian lifestyle. “Documenting parties with alcohol (p. 106), flirtatious looks (p. 294), and pre-marital sex (p. 305) in comparison to the public life in which she had to refrain from hugging her boyfriend for fear of persecution (Satrapi, 2003, p. 284)”, are good examples of constructing an individual identity against what society imposed on her. Specifically, as illustrated in the second chapter, in the case of the *hejab*, she decides to rebel against it and construct her own identity and agency in a way totally opposite to public rules. *Persepolis* is the actualisation of such rebellion.<sup>202</sup> Satrapi’s rebellious position is due to her promotion of individualism. Not only does she speak as an individual *vis-à-vis* the community of believers, she does go a “step further by actually writing and illustrating a memoir – and this story has her doing all she can [like designing her own way of the *hejab*] to take control of her life even in the face of social upheaval” (Sarria, 2012, [emphasis added]). The anti *hejab* position of Satrapi, in fact, is rooted in the “removal of her individuality” (Hwink, 2012). The *hejab* means sameness for her, and this lack of identity and uniqueness causes her rejection of the veil. Subsequently, to reject the political notions in

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<sup>202</sup> According to Satrapi: “the fact is, when you are adolescent, if you are told you cannot do something, you will surely do it. So it could become a fashion - worse, a symbol of rebellion. If wearing a veil becomes your symbol of rebellion, then you certainly know about irony!” (Satrapi in *The Guardian*, 2003).

introducing the Iranian woman to the world, Satrapi defines Iran beyond the borders of the Islamic Republic.

In spite of her *intentio auctoris*, for which Satrapi is well arguing the *shari'atizing* of the publicity of social rules in Iran, the *intentio lectoris* seems to impose a new different meaning on *Persepolis*. On the whole, the criticism of orientalism raised against *Persepolis* can also be said about the book that Satrapi, also, implicitly recognizes the dehumanising effects of secularisation on French women alike. It might be contended that through representing herself in a sympathetic way, she is condemning both the Islamic *shari'ah* and the imposed secularism as deficient in so far as the human rights and freedom of choice are concerned. In other words, as indicated in the second chapter of this research, by showing some feminist agendas, Satrapi confirms her position against the Islamic fundamentalism rather than undermining the credibility of the *hejab*. Her narrative, however, raised sympathy for the plight of Iranian women under the Islamic ideology in particular. By referring to the *hejab* as an oppressive cage and Satrapi's rebellious position towards it, many feminists essentialized Satrapi's rendition of it; while she is equally concerned about both banning the *hejab* in a secular context like France, as well as the compulsory *hejab* in the Islamic Republic.

In short, Satrapi's agenda as an individual has been translated "primarily in terms of resistance to the regularizing impetus of structures of normativity" (Mahmood, 2011a, p. 23). This means that Satrapi's activities and behaviours are not products of her independent will; rather, the *hejab* rules were structural forces that undermined her agency. This is, however, far from Satrapi's definition of agency. This kind of agency does not belong to Satrapi herself, but is a product of the political and social situation in which she is located. According to Mahmood, "it is best not to propose a theory of agency but to analyse agency in terms of the different modalities it takes and grammar of concepts in which its particular affect, meaning, and form resides" (2011a, p. 188). Accordingly, Satrapi argues that her agency is no different than any other human beings. She opposes the veil and its imposition but not the idea of veiling or virtue of modesty. For Satrapi, the 'freedom of choice' is at the core of the proper realization of the *hejab* discourses. Satrapi's objection to the compulsory veiling politics as symbolic of the lack of individual liberty in Iran is one built on the notion of separation of religion and state. Her attempts to grapple with the political and cultural gendered citizenship in Iran has led the feminist circles or "Western" media to identify her with the disempowered subaltern women rising against the Islamic patriarchy in Iran. However, the analysis of Satrapi's *intentio auctoris* has demonstrated her disjunction from the current stereotypes. Through the message of love and humanity, Satrapi suggests a critical reflection upon the influence of politics on Islam and secularism alike. Her dual position articulates a unique look at approaching a unified identity for humanity beyond the borders of the Islam and secularism. Satrapi's objection to

the Islamic Republic policies is interpreted as the objection of an individualist against Islam; hence, the accusation of *Islam setizi* and orientalism.

Satrapi's text, as argued by the orientalist critics, reinforces the "Western" hegemonic agendas out of hatred for the form of Islamism which she accuses of robbing her individuality and freedom of choice. Elaborating on the *hejab* as a sign of oppression, as argued by the critics, is the projection of secular and individual "Western" values on Muslim cultures, hence unconvincing. Basically, Satrapi reveals her positioning within the "Western" educated, upper-class elites. Accordingly, in this, she occludes the majority of Iranian women whose social class has never passed up the opportunity to condemn or criticise the Islamic government for applying religion at public level. Her class politics and her "Westernized" background with respect to Iranian religious and cultural history is not able to envisage a new image of women within Iranian society. Absent from her work, according to Iranian officials, are references to the national, anthropological, cultural and religious complicity in sustaining Islam in power for purposes of defence, resistance and independence from foreign powers. As argued, purposeful elisions and omissions are redeeming characteristics of orientalist works and post-revolutionary memoirs are often deliberately incorporating occasional elisions and silences in their accounts. Therefore, her text remains markedly "partial" in its foregrounding issues relating to Iranian identity. However, needless to mention that, Satrapi's account is partial and personal - simply *another* [emphasis added] picture of Iran and the way it informs the Iranian system. This should not be mistaken with *the picture* of Iran. It is only a different account from that of the "Western" media or the Islamic Republic.

Accusations of orientalism are identifiable not only in terms of the *hejab*, but also in discussions of fact/fiction in autobiographies. As illustrated in chapter 3, an analysis of *intentio lectoris* clearly showed that de-contextualising the genre of autobiography in its reception can present it as either a "fictional narrative" or a "true account of events". Discussions of *Persepolis* and its epigones within the framework of orientalism tend to regard these autobiographies as experiences their authors have never had, objecting to them as not a reliable source of information or mal-documented evidences. The challenge in discussions of fact and fiction is the process of innovation and restructuring rather than reflecting and reporting. This is even more conspicuous in autobiographies with child language or those which are combining fantasy with memory. The child narrative technique or the postmemory reflection can be risky as they might distort the authenticity and the underlying reality which are the *sin qua non* of an autobiography as a genre. Indeed, *Persepolis* with its account of the war or the Islamic Revolution has a collection of evidences that are either experienced directly by Satrapi or shared with her indirectly over a long period of time. This is quite similar to that of Art Spiegelman's *Maus* narrating the story of those who survived the Holocaust. Although

*Maus* is a collection of stories and images, the elements of fictionality seem to be unavoidable in the process of identification and in retelling their stories. Consequently, it is impossible to narrate a story without any extra elements. This represents a breaking point in the discussions on autobiography to be read and interpreted differently from media or news reports. In short, *Persepolis* and other memoirs, discussed so far in this research, break what has been termed as “conventional autobiography”. Being referential arts, they can only best create partial truth based on the subjectivity of the entire process. As the result, it would be much safer to consider *Persepolis* and similar works as postmodern autobiographies beyond the borders of generic, fixed and boxed conventional autobiographies. Approaching *Persepolis* as a postmodern autobiographical genre with a personal, subjective and partial interpretation of a woman whose *intentio auctoris* is giving voice to wiping off the notions of xenophobia, and spreading humanity could be conducive to a surprisingly different understanding, and representation of it. While investigating the specifics of *intentio lectoris* as different interpretations of Satrapi’s *intentio auctoris*, this research analyses the cultural, political, social and religious agendas behind them. Iran, just like any other country (including secular “Western” governments), cannot be discussed without considering its religious substratum. Shi’a Islam and the history of Iran’s relations with the world especially the “West” should be seriously included in any discourses on Iran. Explaining the basis of the Iranian political system is an exercise that requires not just familiarity with the 1979 revolution, but also with the events that are associated with the birth and rise of Shi’ism. The role of religion in Iranian politics and public life as well as the internal struggle between clerics and rulers as understood within Iran contextualises the “anti-Western” orientations of Iranian policies before and after the revolution; hence, explaining the accusation of *Islam setizi*. The issues of post-election events in 2009, for example, as discussed in *Persepolis*’ epigones in the third chapter showed the necessity of the historical and religious background in understanding the anti-imperialist and anti-orientalist positions of the Islamic Republic. Following the 2009 post-election unrests, the officials claimed that their act had foiled a “Western” attempt to topple the Islamic Republic. The Iranian officials believed that the US and Britain had a hand in post-election protests just like the Velvet Revolution of Czechoslovakia in 1989, the Rose Revolution of Georgia in 2003 and the Orange Revolution of Ukraine in 2004.<sup>203</sup> Ayatollah Khamenei in a gathering of university students in Tehran said: “there is no doubt that the events were planned in advance of the election” (Mackey in *The New York Times*, 2009). According to Mackey, the Iranian

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<sup>203</sup> According to Mackey, 2009: “the comparison is extremely unflattering to those in power. After the fall of the Berlin wall, the Czechoslovak Communist regime was so unpopular that it crumbled in a matter of days when it became clear that enforcing its will through violence against peaceful demonstrators was no longer an option” (*The New York Times*, 2009).

government tried to convince the people that the country was coping with a plot orchestrated by “Western” countries.

With the emergence of the Green Movement in the aftermath of the 2009 presidential elections, hopes for democratic change are again threatened by growing US–Israeli talk of bombing or invasion, on the pretext of Iran’s supposed work on nuclear weapons. US-led Western antagonism to Iran has effectively boosted the hardliners in government and enabled them to silence the internal voices of reform and dissent (Mir-Hosseini, 2011, p. 9).

Mousavi, the alternative to Ahmadinejad, and a number of clerics<sup>204</sup> and his supporters were accused of following “Western” inspired agendas. Casting doubts on the body of Islamic legitimacy, a number of Shi’a clerics confronted the regime’s conduct following the election. Important figures such as former presidents, Rafsanjani and Khatami, who were backing Mousavi, openly criticised the government’s crackdown on the protesters. In addition to that, some dissident *olama* started to comment and criticise the government’s actions. For example, Ayatollah Montazeri commented, “what we have is not Islamic republic, but military republic” (Daragahi in *Los Angeles Times*, 2009).<sup>205</sup> Overall, the 2009 election raised concerns among different groups among them human rights activists and feminists. Fatemeh Sadeghi (2012) in *The Green Movement: A Struggle against Islamist Patriarchy* wrote that the largest event regarding the gender discrimination policies in Iran since the 1979 is the Green Movement. An example of Neda Agha Soltan<sup>206</sup> shows the humiliating policies of Ahmadinejad’s government against women (p. 126). Similarly, Mir-Hosseini describes the Green movement as an organic action towards civil rights rather than merely a critique of the fraudulent election (2011, pp. 10-11). Later on, the post-election crisis cast doubts over the legitimacy of the government (Axworthy, 2013, p. 415). According to Axworthy, “when [in Iran] innocents are beaten up, tortured and shot for asking what has happened to their vote, and when peaceful funerals are broken up by club-wielding thugs” the political system of Iran is believed to be anti-democratic (Axworthy, 2013, p. 410).

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<sup>204</sup> “One complication the Green Movement faces is that, while its leaders consist of individuals who have played a central role in the shaping of the Islamic Republic in the early years, they have not only been marginalised, in the aftermath of the 2009 presidential elections, but have also been accused of constituting a ‘fifth column’ and of organizing sedition against the system” (Adelkhani, 2012, p. 23).

<sup>205</sup> Along with Montazeri, there were some other clerics in the opposition in the aftermath of 12 June. Among those, Yusef Sanei, a reformist *marja’* for some Shi’as had denounced the policies of the Islamic Republic as illegitimate. “Regime-oriented clerics attempted to begin proceedings to remove his status as *marja-e taqlid* [...] but others resisted them on his behalf” (Axworthy, 2013, p. 408-409).

<sup>206</sup> “Neda Agha Soltan, was reportedly shot to death by a plainclothes Basiji in Amir-Abad Street during one of the huge post electoral street protests in Tehran. [...] Neda represented women of the younger generation. Her death was, therefore, very challenging for the conservative establishment and it was for this very reason that the government did its best to manipulate it. Claiming the video to have been fabricated, the state media concertedly attributed it to foreign agents and oppositional groups. Despite these efforts, Neda became a strong icon of the Green Movement” (Sadeghi, 2012, p. 124).

The opposition of clerics to the principles and policies of the Islamic government in Iran is not limited to the post-election events. This dates back to well before the “Westernisation” of the country under the Pahlavi dynasty. When Persia was ruled by the Qajar dynasty, an absolute monarchy, sovereignty was embodied in the person of the monarch. Obedience to his decrees was an unconditional duty and all Persians were subjects of the Shah. Unhappy with the situation, political leaders and people promoted the Constitutional Revolution (1906) which tried to limit the power of the ruler (Shah) with a series of constitutional laws. These were later suspended by the Pahlavi dynasty. Reza Khan and his son enforced their decrees. In this regard, Ayatollah Khomeini established a new way of governance, one defined by Islamism, not nationalism. The seventy year old constitution was abolished. The idea of establishing an Islamic government based on *velayat-e faqih* (governance of the jurist) was fundamental, according to Ayatollah Khomeini. This idea, though discussed from many angles of *fiqh* (Islamic law) by various learned *foqaha* (jurists), finds no general consensus. As mentioned in the first chapter, Khomeini’s interpretation of the principle of the “governance of the jurists” was quite innovative, and had generated much controversy ever since. The majority of *olama*, in fact, reject this politicised reading, and hold the view that religion and politics should cooperate but remain two distinct spheres.

After the revolution and with the establishment of theocracy, the clerics in Iran attempted to apply a vision of Islam at the state level. The political system of Ayatollah Khomeini privileges the collective over individual discourse. The amalgamation of religious obligations with citizenship defined sacred responsibility for both the nation and the state. The newly defined collective religious institution, according to Khomeini, is “capable of contesting Western cultural and political hegemony” (Mahmood, 2011a, p. 62). The principle of Khomeini’s institution is “*amr bil ma’ruf wal-nahi ‘an al-monkar* (to enjoin others in the doing of good or right, and the forbidding of evil or wrong)”, around which many of the state policies have been elaborated (Mahmood, 2011a, p. 58). According to Mahmood, enjoining others to piety can sometimes extend beyond the “encouragement to the use of force in prohibiting undesirable conduct (as suggested by the second part of the injunction” (2011a, p. 60). In Iran, forbidding the wrong or evil is sometimes understood through the use of violence and compulsion to bring about piety and morality, as discussed in the case of the *hejab*. According to Ayatollah Khomeini’s foundation, the Islamic state is primarily responsible for the correct implementation of *shari’ah* in the context of society. Consequently, many Iranian men and women have found “Western” individualist alternatives to challenge the state’s claim on *amr bil maruf*. The struggle of many women to achieve equality and emancipation from mandatory dress code policies of the revolutionary government is therefore engaged with the formation of feminist movements using the media and the orientalist tropes “familiar in the West to talk

about subjectivity, identity and power” (Moallem, 2005, p. 120). The formation of Islamic feminism within the realm of Islamic jurisprudence was a solution to address the issues affecting women in the Islamic Republic. In this sense, women and men alike started identifying themselves with a form of Islam beyond the borders of the Islamic Republic. The foundation of *velayat-e faqih* in Iran is quite dissimilar to the form of Islamic governments in other Muslim countries due to its communal and pluralist conception of civil society. The convergence of the politics and religion in post-revolutionary Iran has inspired the call to define Islam at an individual global level, or to save Islam from the state authority.

As discussed in the first chapter, a wide spectrum of opinions are at play in the debate about the interpretation of Islamic democracy and the foundational approach, i.e. Khomeini’s *velayat-e faqih*. Menashri identifies democracy as “the participation of people in power and decision making” which is desired in a democratic system, while obedience to the power of *vali-ye faqih* in Iran is nationally and politically desired (Menashri, 2001, p. 37). Guardianship is thus equated to dictatorship. In the case of *velayat-e faqih* as it was propounded by Ayatollah Khomeini, some scholars believe that its incompatibility with democracy is even more far-fetched. As “the legitimacy of all decisions and acts in the public domain depends on the approval and authorization of the supreme jurist as the *vali-ye amr*”, democracy is meaningless (Kadivar, 2011). Kadivar believes that, Islam is not an obstacle in a democratic management *per se* and Islamic societies can keep democracy while committed to their ethical values, however, the problem with *velayat-e faqih* is a serious one in democratic debates. Kadivar states that *velayat-e faqih* is not Islamic in base. He distinguishes no difference between the monarchical system of the former Shah of Iran and the current system of *velayat-e faqih*. Therefore, equality (especially between men and women) cannot be achieved in the Islamic Republic, the base of which is *velayat-e faqih*. Based on the idea of equality, “the humanity of an individual has priority over his belief, unlike religious principles in which equality is based on the faith of people” (Menashri, 2001, p. 37). Adversaries of the *velayat-e faqih* criticise its foundation as opposed to individual autonomy and freedom of choice. Surpassing the religion, government policies in Iran provoked the fight for democracy and human rights. Many reform movements have been formed as a result, emphasising on a more conservative interpretation of state policies. The emphasis in these movements were “toward the individualization of moral responsibility so characteristic of modern Islam” (Mahmood, 2011a, p. 64). By modern Islam, the intellectuals mean to create a religious realm that is separated from the political, religious and economic realms. These debates created a gap between politicians and intellectuals as well as clerics.

Last but not least, Satrapi’s individualist orientations and her advocacy of the universal liberal concept of human rights seems to be in contradiction with her *intentio auctoris* on this

particular occasion. Along with her *intentio auctoris*, she clearly confirmed her critical position towards the biased representations of her country by journalists and “Western” media, and showed her opposition to French secular feminist circles for their exclusive tendencies for “otherising” the Muslim women. However, her support for universal and individual definition of human rights seems to ignore pluralist religious identities. As argued by Namli in the first chapter of this thesis, any discussions of human rights must be contextualised within the national, cultural and religious ideologies and any violent enforcement of liberalism and individualism must be seen as self-contradiction (2013, p. 140).



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